

PATCHWORK,  
BIOGRAPHY AS HYPERTEXT:  
EXPLORING THE PROBLEMATICS  
OF BIOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION  
AFTER POSTSTRUCTURALISM

By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

1998

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank Professor Gregory Ulmer, who chaired my dissertation from its original incarnation as a more traditional analysis into the methods of literary biography to its final form as a truly experimental project. I am indebted both to his counsel and scholarship, as well as to the many years of emotional support he generously provided. I also owe a debt of thanks to the other members of the committee, Professors Alistair Duckworth, Patricia Craddock and John Craig Freeman, who provided both intellectual stimulation and welcomed infusions of confidence and support. Also, I would like to thank Professor Paul Stacey, whose support during the writing of my masters thesis at the University of Hartford was the original stimulus for this study.

To Miriam Patchen I extend a belated appreciation for waiting out the completion of this study, so many years after the generous interviews, conversation and confidences.

Finally, I would like to extend my loving appreciation to my parents, Jean and Pauline Robitaille, who introduced me to the love of literature and provided an atmosphere of unquestionable emotional support. To my grandmother, Yvonne Daniel, I owe the gift of faith. And I am grateful beyond words to my beloved wife, Julie, without whom this project would lack both its *jouissance* and its conclusion.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	ii
ABSTRACT .....	v
CHAPTERS	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
Convergences .....	1
Theory .....	3
Models/Patches .....	6
Methodology .....	9
Implications .....	13
2 CONTRAST: MANIFESTO FOR A NEW ACADEMIC WRITING .....	21
Ironies .....	21
Plugging in Patchen .....	24
The Status of the "Author" and "Subject" Will Be Re-visited and Re- Positioned in the Electronic .....	25
In the Electronic There Are No Origins and No Destinations and, Thus, "Thesis," "Truth" and the "Real" Are Reconsidered and Repositioned .....	33
The New Electronic Academic Discourse Will Be Non-Totalizing .....	36
Electronic Discourse Will Introduce Alternative Structures and Organizational Patterns .....	39
The Question of Ideology Must Be Revisited and Reconfigured in the Electronic .....	46
3 (A)NALOGY: QUILTING AS HOBBY THEORY .....	57
Quilts and Mourning .....	62
Chaos Theory and the "Crazy" Text(ile) .....	66
From <i>Citizen Kane</i> to <i>Citizen Patchen</i> .....	73
Other Models for Mystoriobiography .....	76
Figures Before the Wall .....	81
More Alternative Approaches .....	83
Passage Through The Wall .....	87
Assessing Patchworking Elements for Electronic Mystoriobiography .....	95

4	(T)ARGET .....	99
	Introduction .....	99
	Crash Sites .....	102
	Conclusion .....	124
5	THE CATT(t)'S TALE/TAILLE .....	129
	Introductory Screens .....	129
	Scene/Space One: The Bedroom .....	130
	Scene/Space Two: The Projection Room .....	135
	Scene/Space Three: The Newsroom .....	137
	Scene/Space Four: The Thatcher Memorial Library .....	142
	Scene/Space Five: The Jazz Tent .....	143
	Other Scenes/Other Spaces .....	145
	Final Scene/Space: The Cellar as Site of "das Ding" .....	146
	'das Ding': This Place 'Between Two Deaths' .....	149
	REFERENCES .....	154
	BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH .....	158

Abstract of Dissertation to the Graduate School  
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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December 1998

Chairman: Gregory Ulmer  
Major Department: English

The hypertext project, Patchwork, the subject of this study, is the result of a convergence of critical theory and new modes of electronic media at a point in time when artists and scholars continue to debate the impact of poststructuralist and postmodern thought on the humanities. Patchwork is an examination into the problematics of biographical representation as witnessed in the life and art of multimedia artist and poet, Kenneth Patchen (1926-1972).

An examination of the vast array of oftentimes conflicting materials that compose the Patchen archive reveals a decidedly cubist subject. This study has attempted to strategize an alternative, experimental biographical practice capable of re-presenting these multiple perspectives. The possibility for such an approach was inspired by George Landow's assertion that hypertext is an ideal laboratory for testing out certain tenants of critical theory. Following this lead, research toward the development of Patchwork then turned to the

writings of Gregory Ulmer on applied grammatology and heuristics, which provided the process of inventio which came to inform the aesthetics and design principles for the hypertext mystoriobiography.

Employing Ulmer's heuristic of the CATT(t), the various stages and chapters of this study serve as a manifesto for a new form of academic writing. Utilizing Ulmer's heuristic concepts of hobby theory, mystory and the "popcycle," Patchwork, in turn, takes the form of an electronic patchwork quilt in which the embedded material of both the biographer and biographical subject are "stitched" into a remake, or detournment, of Citizen Kane. The resulting CD-Rom becomes a virtual tour of Kane's "Xandu" here reconceptualized at Citizen Patchen.

This attempt to experiment with an alternative, poststructuralist mystoriobiography employs various practices introduced by critical theory which address the very elements of biographical representation that traditionally problematize such an endeavor. This study underscores that in the case of a subject such as Kenneth Patchen, whose life and art is fraught with all sort of deconstructive tendencies, an experimental approach is not only justified, it becomes, in fact, the more illuminating route to travel.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### Convergences

The hypertext project, Patchwork, which is the subject of this dissertation is the result of a convergence of critical theory and new modes of electronic media at a point in time when artists and scholars continue to debate the impact of poststructuralist and postmodern thought on the humanities. Nearly a decade ago, I began research into the life and art of multimedia artist and poet, Kenneth Patchen (1926-1972), hoping to produce an "authoritative" biography of my "subject." Long before that decade had concluded, it would become fashionable to call into question the very notions of textual "authority" and a representational, unified "subject."

My own questioning of such fundamental biographical imperatives arose directly from my first plebeian forays into the realm of biographical research. After later reading considerable literature on the biographical method, what I discovered was hardly considered a trade secret: literary biography demanded one be a Jack-of-all-critical-trades (historian, psychologist, sociologist, just to name a few) and be ultimately fated seldom to be a master of any. And this at a time when the disciplines, such as those mentioned above, were each being rendered problematic under the critical eye of poststructuralist thought.

To make a dreadfully long story short, I soon became more consumed with the problematics of biographical representation than in the writing of a "definitive" Patchen

biography. One of the many ironies inherent in my digression is the fact that Kenneth Patchen, like numerous other complex individuals and artists, had left behind a minefield of biographical and artistic conundrums waiting to explode in the smug face of any future "truth" hound hoping to sniff out the essence of his life and work. I was soon engaged in the classical struggle, inherent in such research, with how to re-present to my readers, not simply the facts of a life, but rather, with a replication of the research process itself, with all its labyrinthine, poststructuralist twists and turns.

While I never feared the warnings of those who predicted that such an approach would render the biographical "author" dead, or reduce his works to indeterminable "texts," I did fear the possibility that I would not be able to find a suitable format for allowing the reader to determine his, or her, own reading of the life and works. And, more importantly, would I be able to find the suitable format for allowing the reader's personal engagement, not just with the materials of the text, but with the various problematics of handling them? It was the emergence of hypertext which served to alleviate such fears.

There are two contemporary theorists whose works themselves have been the site of significant convergences of post-critical thought, and to whom the Patchwork project is largely indebted. First came the publication in 1985 of Gregory Ulmer's Applied Grammarology, which introduced its readers to the "third" or "applied" phase of Jacques Derrida's grammarology, and in so doing, outlined a new pedagogy for the humanities, and in particular, a humanities now largely experienced in the era of audiovisual communications. In his next book, Teletheory, published in 1989, Ulmer invents a genre, called mystory, for the cognitive structures of the electronic culture.



Contemporaneous with Ulmer's theorizing toward a new electronic pedagogy was the work of Brown University Professor, George Landow, on the development of a highly interactive form of electronic text, called hypertext, which correctly proclaims to be the ideal laboratory for the testing of various essential points of contemporary literary and semiological theory. The results of this work were published in Hypertext: The Covergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology in 1992. Of particular interest to my investigation into the possibilities of biographical representation, for example, are the ability of hypertext to embody Derrida's idea of "de-centering" and Barthes's conception of the "readerly" versus the "writerly" text.

In the balance of this introduction, let me briefly outline key elements of the work by Ulmer and Landow, and suggest how these elements have shaped the methodology for constructing Patchwork, an interactive biographical hypertext whose subject is the problematics of constructing a subject we might call "Kenneth Patchen."

### Theory

To begin, let us consider what Ulmer found of interest in Derrida that shaped, first, his development of an "applied grammatology," and more recently, teletheory. Ulmer points out that: "Writing, as Derrida practices it, is something other than deconstruction, the latter being a mode of analysis, while the former is a mode of composition" (Applied Grammatology xi). Identifying in Derrida's work the utilization of "three levels of communication--images, puns, and discourse," Ulmer finds that what is most important for his work" is the extent to which Derrida systematically explores the nondiscursive levels--images and puns, or models and homophones--as an alternative mode of composition and thought applicable to academic work, or rather, play" (xi). "This writing," Ulmer posits,

"is not a method of analysis or criticism but of invention" (xii). Ulmer then postulates that this "new compositional model . . . reflects a larger program that might be derived from Derrida's [deconstructive] texts," a program Ulmer labels "grammatology" (xii). What is significant for the purposes of my hypertextual project is Ulmer's insistence that:

"Grammatology as composition (Writing) is not confined to books and articles, but is addressed more comprehensively to the needs of multichannel performance--in the classroom and in video and film as well" (xii).

Thus, grammatology offered the promise of a form of composition that would not lure me with the same siren sounds of "truth" that doom most biographers to the rocks of exegetical totalism or "subject" mongering. Rather, a grammatological approach might allow me the means to invent a pedagogical apparatus that invited the reader of this electronic text to explore the possibilities of the Patchen archive both as a field of information and as a means of self-instruction in the possibilities and problematics of biographical representation.

Such possibilities are elucidated by Ulmer in the Preface to Teletheory, where he explains that his proposed genre of mystory "takes into account the new discursive and conceptual ecology interrelating orality, literacy and videocy" (vii). Of particular relevance to the impact of teletheory, and its specific genre, mystory, on the humanities is the fact that it "brings into relationship the three levels of common sense--common, explanatory, and expert--operating in the circulation of culture from "low" to "high" and back again. . . , " thus providing a "translation (or transduction) process researching equivalencies among the discourses of science, popular culture, everyday life, and private experience" (vii).

Ulmer's acknowledgment of the impact of his inventio on the humanities, and his challenge to the discipline, is boldly stated as such:

The failure of the Humanities disciplines to communicate with the public may be due in part to the fact that what separates specialized humanists from laymen is not only our conceptual apparatus and the discourses of the academy, but the very medium in which we work--the printed word. It is time for the humanities disciplines to establish our cognitive jurisdiction over the communications revolution. (viii)

The decision to translate my own disciplinary research into the biographical method in general, and the biographical subject, Kenneth Patchen, in particular, into an electronic hypertext, was doubly confirmed by Landow's own acknowledgment of Derrida via Ulmer in the opening chapter to Hypertext. The convergence of Derrida/Ulmer/Landow with Robitaille/Patchen appears in the form of a parallel between Derrida's deconstructive enterprise and Patchen's lifelong attempt to explore and expand the possibilities of personal expression through multimedia art. The following observation by Landow of Derrida may be said to echo my own experiences with Patchen's work and with Patchen as subject of a biographical hypertext. Writes Landow:

Derrida's groping for a way to foreground his recognition of the way text operates in a print medium--he is, after all, the fierce advocate of writing as against orality--shows the position, possibly the dilemma, of the thinker working with print who sees its shortcomings but for all his brilliance cannot think outside this mentalite. (Hypertext 9)

What I am trying to suggest here is that Derrida's "groping" and the subsequent new kinds of text that he has created are recognized by theorists such as Ulmer and Landow as providing both the theoretical underpinnings and numerous specific terms, models and strategies which lend themselves ideally to the composition of hypertext. I would like now to consider several of these terms, models and strategies and briefly outline how, in the

chapters to follow, they will be utilized in the design and operation of Patchwork. Finally, I will consider some of the implications for the humanities that the creation of such a hypertext biography might pose.

### Models/Patches

A seminal point of convergence, one that both names and legitimizes my Patchwork project, derives from Derrida, and after him, Ulmer's, employment of the concept of homonymy, based on the

premise of applied grammatology . . . that the cartouche principle of the signature, directing the relation of the proper name to common nouns . . . may be generalized to include the process of concept formation--the relation of an abstract term to the metaphors from which the term is "derived." (Applied Grammatology, 26)

For Derrida, the concept of homonymy allowed for the possibility of creating a text, Signsponge, generated out of the poet's name, "Frances Ponge," in which, as Ulmer describes it, "[Derrida] treats Ponge's oeuvre as if it were written in the key of 'Ponge,'" which Ulmer sees as "one way to generalize a rhizomatic relation to the world" (Teletheory, 160).

Such an approach, suggests Ulmer, allows for the possibility of "celebrating what a name founds, what may be found in a name" (161). This "signature procedure," more importantly, "is not the naming of a determinism, but an invention, inventio, whose purpose is to produce a text" (164). In employing such a procedure, I am following the rhizomatic possibilities of the signature "Patchen" as it converges homonymically with the textile metaphors of the "patch" as "patchwork," in both its square (printed), round (electronic) and hobby (theory) senses. (I'll elaborate on Deleuze and Guatarri's use of "rhizome" and Ulmer's concept of "theory hobby" in the handbook to follow.) Writing

thus, in what Derrida considers this third modality of the signature, one arrives at what Ulmer, in his invention of mystory, refers to as "metaphors or vehicles for a poetics of invention, a memory system or mnemonics available for thinking about any matter whatsoever" (165).

What I want to think about, therefore, are the following. For example, what would a hypertextual biography look like if it functioned not only in the traditional sense, as a repository of archival information concerning an artist's life and creative practices, as well as an attempt to reconstruct some semblance of a "self" in the humanist sense of the word, but rather, to use Ulmer's description of Signsponge, as a "theoretical elaboration of the poetics of generating the text," a work, in other words, that is "at once the thing and the model" (Teletheory 156-7). Identifying Derrida's project as otobiography, which "mixes the modes of critique and fiction," Ulmer, in his incorporation of otobiography to his genre, mystory, sets out to demonstrate, as in "Derrida at Little Big Horn: A Fragment," "the possibility of applying literary devices to the practice of academic discourse" (161).

How then, for example, might I incorporate into my hypertext, a mystorical "patch" which brings into relation (via multichannel, hypermedia capabilities of this new electronic medium) such mystorical levels of discourse as the "personal (autobiography), popular (community stories, oral histories or popular culture), [and] expert (disciplines of knowledge)" (Teletheory 209)?

In Patchwork, for example, the personal, or autobiographical level would link, again by way of homonymy, "Patch/Patchen" with "Robitaille/robe(text-tile) and "taille"/tailor, thus generating various electronic webs, or rhizomatic linkages between my familial association with the New England textile industry, exposure to my father's career

as an engraver of other persons' signatures and the translation of this autobiographical link, with my "minor vita," as Ulmer calls it "(alluding to Deleuze and Guattari's minor literature, minor science)," into the present context of electronic biographical "patchworking" (Strategies 17). Additional autobiographical links would include my first traumatic awareness of death via electronic transmission of certain images over my grandmother's television, and the resurfacing of this memory as a recurrent phenomenon in my problematic relationship with biographical representation in general (i.e., explication as annihilation) and in my fetishistic relationship with the subject "Kenneth Patchen," in particular (e.g., Patchen's own preoccupation with death, the disaster of his sister's fatal accident, his violent art and his own association with the 'death of language and the author' phenomenon). In trying to understand the relevance of Patchen's "story" to my own cultural formation, such factors need to be reckoned with, for it is in this mystical convergence of disasters that the reader/co-author of my hypertext discovers that exploring an author's corpus is, in the present instance, to enter an electronic crypt, where the Freudian theory of melancholia and mourning results, as Derrida suggests of Nietzsche in Glas, with Nietzsche's unsuccessful mourning, and the deferral of his signature (Derrida, The Ear of the Other, 56-59).

How, similarly, might the reader/re-creator of this hypertext generate his or her own mystery in such a fashion as to consider the following relationships and convergences: a) the archival material available for the construction of "Kenneth Patchen" as a biographical subject, b) a miming of Patchen's own poetics and avant-garde practices as a means by which to compose a critical literary biography of his life. Step C would then combine "a" and "b" with the three levels of discourse inherent in mystery to create an

open ended "Patchwork" conceived of not as a "text of justification," (the biographical urge to codify a life), but rather, one "of discovery" intended to "help the composer articulate the ground of invention" (Ulmer, Applied Grammatology, 211).

In positing the link between postructuralist thought and hypertext, Landow cites the work of a diverse range of theorists whose concepts are embodied in both the design and application of this new electronic medium. From Barthes's "galaxy of signifiers" to Foucault's notion that the "'frontiers of a book are never clear-cut,'" the parallels between computer hypertext and critical theory are many and significant. For the purposes of Patchwork, it is my intention to create an electronic crazy quilt, where individual electronic "patches" whose signatures read Derrida, Barthes, Ulmer, Foucault, Lacan, Kristeva, Deleuze, Guatarri, Robitaille et al. (the Patchwork quilt is, like Borges's labyrinth, infinite in size) will, in a manner of speaking, be woven into the larger quilt, each "patch" representing a "reading" into the problematic of transforming the infinite and chaotic galaxy of signifiers that might signify "Kenneth Patchen," into that which, in the manner of Lacan's *objet petite a*, is marked by a "lack" that renders it always something both more and less than wholecloth.

### Methodology

In linking my project to that of Ulmer's and Landow's theoretical explorations in hypertext, I wish to further extend an experiment which Ulmer states in his Introduction to Heuretics "derived from Hayden White's challenge to contemporary historians to reinvent historiography using the arts and sciences of today as models in the same way that the nineteenth century historiographers drew upon the models available to them in their

period" (xii). My objective, then, is to reinvent biographical methodology using a model provided by Ulmer in Heuretics.

Heuretics, which Ulmer defines as "the branch of logic that treats the art of discovery or invention," has as its goal "not only to reproduce historical inventions" but "also to invent new poetics" (xii). In introducing his analysis of the "story of invention," Ulmer cites the significant contributions of major figures whose theories and practice have shaped a long "tradition of the discourse on method" (8). The list includes among others: Freud and Marx, Dziga-Vertov and Eisenstein, Wittgenstein and Barthes. Ulmer singles out for special consideration, "André Breton's invention of surrealism as a sample of the generative approach to writing theory" (5). Given Patchen's role as a central figure in American surrealist and avant-garde literature and art, I am drawn to Ulmer's extension of surrealism, and his inquiry into how "might an invention such as surrealism, rooted in a particular historical and cultural moment, be simulated in the heurctic experiment?" (6). Robert Ray, crediting Ulmer's influence, provides an excellent series of examples of the application of surrealist strategies for the purpose of doing theory. These strategies will inform the creation of Patchwork.

In addressing the question of surrealism's re-simulation in the heurctic experiment, Ulmer identifies Breton's "The Manifesto of Surrealism" as "belong[ing] to the tradition of the discursive method." Furthermore, explains Ulmer

A comparison of Breton's manifesto with the various classics of method reveal that they tend to include a common list of elements, which are presentable for mnemonic reference by the acronym CATTt (Ulmer, 1991b). The CATTt includes the following operations:  
 C = Contrast (opposition, inversion, differentiation)  
 A = Analogy (figuration, displacement)  
 T = Theory (repetition, literalization)



T = Target (application, purpose)

t = Tale (secondary elaboration, representability) (8)

In Heuretics, Ulmer considers how the above operations are manifested in Plato's Phaedrus. In summarizing Ulmer's explication of CATTt in Plato, I will briefly outline, by analogy, how I will employ the CATTt in the construction of the hypertext, Patchwork. Indeed, Ulmer's CATTt is to serve as the blueprint for my hypertext project, which has as its objective testing out this invention (CATTt) on the subject of biography. Thus, each of the chapters to follow will focus on the five elements of the CATTt.

"The theorist," explains Ulmer, "begins by pushing away from an undesirable example or prototype, whose features provide an inventory of qualities for an alternative method" (8). In Plato's case, he "defines his own position in opposition to that of the Sophists" (8). In Chapter 2, "Contrast," the undesirable example or prototype is the traditional methodologies employed in the composition of the literary biography with its attendant qualities of verisimilitude, linearity, teleology, logocentrism and theories of authorship and subjectivity, to name a few.

In his discussion of analogy, Ulmer (citing Buchler) states: "Method becomes invention when it relies on analogy and chance" (8). Adds Ulmer, "If methods tend to be practiced as algorithms, their invention is heuristic . . ." (9). Plato's analogy for inventing the dialectic is "between proper rhetoric and medicine" (9). In the case of Patchwork, as discussed in Chapter 3, "Analogy," the analogy will be between the theory and craft of quilt-making and the application of critical theory to a hypertext biography.

The "theory" component of the CATTt requires that "the theorist generate[s] a new theory based on the authority of another theory whose argument is accepted as literal

rather than a figurative analogy" (9). In each case, according to Ulmer, a "new theory will include in one register a literal repetition of a prior theory, modified, of course, by its interaction with the other elements of the CATTt" (9). In Chapter 4 I will import various elements of post-structuralist theory, particularly as they have informed Ulmer's grammatalogical extension of critical theory into the realm of electronic media. More specifically, as mentioned earlier, I wish to experiment with Ulmer's concept of theory craft as the means to join the theory component (T) with Analogy (A)/Quilt-making and Tale(t)/hypertext biography.

Since it is the intention of the theorist to have "in mind an area of application that the new method is designed to address" and since this target "is often identified in terms of an institution whose needs have motivated the search for the method" (9), I would like to target the flourishing institution of literary biography, whose received conventions and traditional methodology have only, of late, begun to be deconstructed and problematized. As Ulmer summarizes, "Target supplies an inventory out of what is lacking or missing, or out of the excess of a new situation for which no practices yet exist" (9). Thus, in Chapter 5, "Target," I will speak to that inventory of what would appear to be lacking or missing in terms of present institutional practices and suggest how, through the incorporation of mystory, the CATTt's tail/tale (linking homonymically to Robi-taille, French for tailor/stitcher/text-tile worker) provides out of the excess of this situation, a new practice of biographical writing and research.

Finally, according to Ulmer's CATTt, "the invention, the new method, must itself be represented in some genre," ideally, perhaps, in the form of "a dramatization of the theory of knowledge appropriate for the human subject envisioned by or presumed by) the

Theory" (9). Since, in the case of Plato's dialogues, his "discourse on method did what it said (was a showing as well as a telling," in Chapter 6 I will perform an experiment that presents a series of such parallel gestures. I will explore Landow's premise that hypertext is the ideal laboratory for testing out certain tenets of post-structuralist theory. By extension, I will employ Ulmer's practice of theory craft and mystory as the means by which to test out the theory (T) of what becomes of biography when written in this new discourse and medium.

### Implications

Many scholars continue to agree with biographer Leon Edel's assertion that biography "has not yet articulated a 'methodology'" (Edel 4-5). Others, such as Hugh Brogan, insist that the attempt to construct a "... cubist biography would be impossible, for it would too patently impose the writer's design on the subject's life" (Brogan 104). Implicit in the concerns expressed in, say, a review of the year's New York Times' reviews of biographies, is the implicit notion that were a methodology to be discovered and agreed upon, it would fulfill what Brogan asserts is the "aim at accuracy of detail and completeness of outline," and would avoid at all costs "the ingenuities of deconstructing critics" (104, 110).

What those of us who have begun to explore the possibilities of collaborative writing have discovered, and there is much here for literary biographers to consider, is that, to quote Barthes's S/Z: "this 'T' which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite (Barthes 10). In thus conceptualizing the Patchwork hypertext as an electronic quilt, whose nodes of intersection recast our notion of 'self' as, in Jean-Francois Lyotard's terms, "a fabric of relations that is now more

complex and mobile than ever before" (15), abandoned is the central executive authority whose signature "author-izes" a reading of the "subject."

In short, one of the major implications of this study is to respond to the assertion that a non-traditional, post-structuralist hypertext literary biography must be, by virtue of its definition, devoid of "meaning" and incapable of bringing the reader into some significant and relevant awareness of both the literary "subject" and the means by which that "subject" might, in fact, be "constructed." In addition, this project explores the possibility that such new methodologies, operating as a generative, rather than merely analytical and hermeneutic, force are, thus, capable of producing "readings" of a life and a body of literature which, albeit untethered from the leash of an author-izing agent, thesis or theme, are, nonetheless, rich in their conveyance of the scents (if not "sense") and traces (if not "truths") of the literary "subject."

Even as I write these introductory remarks, an article in this month's Harper's (June 1996) by Paul Roberts entitled "Virtual Grub Street" is mounting the same critical attack on hypertext as a medium as Brogan has made against the potentialities of a "cubist" or deconstructive biography. I welcome the timely appearance of this article as it makes the sort of no-holds-barred critique the implications of which the Patchwork project is intended to address. Appearing as it does in a widely read and respected magazine, Roberts's article will no doubt confirm the suspicions and fears shared by many who see critical theory's sinister affinity with hypertext as a further assault on literacy and knowledge. Thus, I would like to quote at length from Roberts's article and suggest, in advance, how the Patchwork handbook to follow will take into consideration his various concerns.

In what amounts to the confessions of a guilt-ridden and over-paid free-lance writer of "info-nuggets" and "pap" for CD-ROM companies, Roberts begins by concluding that: "Brevity and blandness: these are the elements of the next literary style" (71). Regrettably, it would seem, Roberts has yet to encounter some of the evocatively poetic hypertexts represented say by the Eastgate catalog of writers, to mention one obvious source. As to the charge of brevity, Roberts makes it clear that his measure is that which he, in quotes, refers to as "normal" writing, in which "the writer uses the paragraph as a bridge between specific points" (75). The problem, which remains surprisingly out of Roberts's view throughout his critique, is that his assignments have been largely info-based encyclopedic CD-ROMS which, by design, are caption oriented, and do not ask of the composer to invent new syntactical and rhetorical strategies in which each page, or "link," can be imaginatively juxtaposed with other pages to constitute, not the "expendability" Roberts laments, but a plurality of readings resulting from a plentitude of perspectives and a logic which seems to leave Roberts out in the cold.

A key paragraph in Roberts's article links the pitfalls of hypertext to academe, critical theory, and the writers of avant-garde literature. Since it serves as a sort of compendium of the sources I will cite as positive influences on the creative use of this new medium, I cite it in full:

Nonlinearity might seem like little more than channel surfing, but its proponents--ranging from wealthy software gurus to tenured English professors--champion it as an authentic yet functional postmodern form, a critical break from the age-old, rigidly linear format of the printed page. Nonlinearity, we're told, redistributes narrative power to readers. It undermines the tyranny of the Author. Its branching "intertextuality" is a much closer match to the brain's own networks. Indeed, advocates believe that the nonlinear text, or hypertext, literature can at last give full expression to the kinds of unconventional discursive impulses that folks like Joyce and Barthes were forced to convey via the grotesquely obsolete linear

format. For that matter, non-linearity provides a kind of running critique of the linear format, laying open the myth that "stories" can be told only one way, in only one direction, and toward only one conclusion: toward "closure." With nonlinearity, as with thought itself, there is no closure, only additional links. Thus nonlinearity, to its proponents, is the beginning of a new, more honest and complex literature--and, perhaps, the beginning of the end of an old one. "The printed book . . . seems destined to move to the margin of our literate culture," writes Jay David Bolter, a Georgia Tech professor of communication and one of the more articulate exponents of electronic texts. "Print will no longer define the organization and presentation of knowledge, as it has for the past five centuries." (73 )

This paragraph, like the article as whole, is itself deserving of some deconstruction. For example, "that stories can be told only one way" is not a myth, nor is it an accurate reading of the historical record. As we will observe in a later chapter, there is considerable precedent for nonlinearity and lack of closure in the print tradition, the midrash of rabbinical exegesis serving as just one prime example. More fundamentally, while the human inclination for narrative closure is indeed a persistent one, its ubiquitousness is matched only by the equally human urge to defy borders, to resist interpretation, to recoil against too easy a sounding of one's "story," as does Hamlet in this most proto-typical of self-deconstructing texts. Consider Borges, with his labyrinthine narratives, as further evidence that a period does not sign the close of a narrative, however linear its path may seem to be.

Neither Joyce nor Barthes, despite their "unconventional discursive impulses," can be credited with the limitations Roberts claims are inherent in the style of CD-ROM composition. The worlds they have created and the delight their texts have brought to legions of readers, recommend their work as models for writers of hypertext.

I am particularly delighted by one of Roberts's most revealing statements, one that concludes, ironically enough, with a textile metaphor, thus "linking" hypertextually and by

way of negative example, Roberts's hypertextual endeavors to my own. He begins by underscoring the virtue and intellectual vigor of his preferred writing practice with the apparently mindless and conspicuously feminine ("knitting") craft of hypertext:

Conventional, linear writing can be a gruesome task. Beyond the lame pay and the feast-or-famine job cycle, the pounding of disparate facts and feelings into a tightly structured narrative is like digging a ditch across a concrete parking lot. By contrast, squirting out blurbs is a cakewalk, a lower-order process managed, I'm sure, by the same lobe that handles heart rate and knitting. (75)

Roberts's statement, aside from the sour grapes and occupational anxiety associated with his having harnessed his literacy skills to shifting paradigms, is replete with damning evidence of the very sort of unified, complexity reducing, singularly plotted narrative toward which literary biographers occasionally set forth and from whose siren-sounded waters few return unhaunted and deconstructed. Indeed, should the biographer set his or herself a "conventional, linear" path, the going will indeed be "gruesome," though this hardly serves as a valorization of the chosen path. One wonders how the facts (not to, mention the reader) suffer at the hands of so much "pounding." As to the metaphor of "digging a ditch across a concrete parking lot," I am reminded of a Zen koan which raises the puzzle: how to extricate a rare, last of its species bird who has grown too large to be removed from the Ming-quality vase into which it had earlier been placed? The answer: "Poof! It's out!" In other words, to research the record of conundrums which the subjects of literary biography, via their behaviors and artistic work, have left behind, not to mention those conundrums imposed apriori by the ideological bent of the biographer, is to watch so many birds be placed in so many vases, thus setting into play the necessary violence, the "pounding" of the interpretive pick-ax.

As regards Roberts's "knitting" reference, the parallel he would appear to be drawing is that between the sadly commercialized and mundane encyclopedic CD-ROM assemblages represented by the dreary sample entries he provides on marine science facts and, say, knitting in its most basic, wool-mitten manifestation. Circumstances have not permitted Roberts to become the Melville of cyberspace, and 'suppressed of voice' he is reduced to a "blurbmeister," unable to create his "extended symphonic rhythms" (75). Knitting, however, when employed in the craft of quilt-making, is no "lower order process" but a craft, as we shall see below, with a rich signifying tradition and a significant body of theoretical discussion. Quilt-making's multimedia content employs a diverse range of text and visually based literacies and, like hypertext, is storied in nonlinear "patches" that are often linked associationally with little emphasis on a narrative thread or closure.

Roberts fear of the lack of control extends beyond his subject matter to that which he can exert over his readers. "I realize," he writes, "I can't make my "linear" readers read what I write in the order that I write it." Sadly, he is forced to admit: "Linear readers skim. They jump ahead, looking for interesting parts, then refer back for context--behaving, in some respects, like the multimedia user." One can hear exasperations of the parental rebuke directed at potential (mis)behaving readers. Such lack of trust is magnified in the closing lines of the paragraph:

But the nonlinear interactive process undeniably accelerates this haphazardness. The nexus of creativity is shifted from the writer to either the producers, who lay out the text links, or the readers, who make use of those links. (77)



Several issues are suggested by this passage. First, were Roberts the producer here, could he envision a reconfiguration of the subject matter (i.e. links) that would allow him to utilize the unique attributes of this medium in a creative and expressive way? Second, might Roberts allow for the development of a poetics that invites reader response, which, while not determined by a controlling narrative or thesis, nonetheless generates reader interaction, intrigue and interpretive impulses?

Feminists have argued with considerable force of proof and conviction that such rage for control is a masculine trait. Further evidence presents itself in the New York Times Book Review (June 9, 1996), where Molly Haskell writes in praise of Barbara Grizzuti Harrison's An Accidental Autobiography. In contrast to Roberts's anxiety over the "haphazard" element in composition, Molly Haskell cites as praiseworthy compositional strategies based on nonlinear pathways to communication and knowledge. Writes Haskell, "This pattern of recurrence and repetition, this sense of memory as a Heraclitean river in which each step is both familiar and new, is the guiding principle for Barbara Grizzuti Harrison . . ." (9). Drawing specific attention to Harrison's use of "nonhierarchical" associations of memory, "Haskell describes the author's inclusion of a "vast number of subjects . . . in chapters arranged alphabetically," a strategy similar, perhaps intentionally so, to that employed by Roland Barthes in his own autobiography, Roland Barthes. Since Barthes's work serves as one of the models for Patchwork that I will discuss below, I read with interest Haskell's congenial response to Harrison's text:

This strategy rejects straightforward developmental biography for something akin to the more relaxed tone of the personal essay, but without even the topical or thematic unity that genre usually has--and to which Ms. Harrison, a past master, is no stranger. The nearest literary convention would be the commonplace book, or what she describes as a scrapbook with "different photographs of the same

emotional memories." In fact, her book is like a collage or a mosaic: clusters of language portraits so richly detailed, and palpable with color, fabric and texture, that they are closer to the visual arts than to conventional prose narrative. (9)

One does, indeed, envision such a text as a CD-ROM. In the hands of another writer and hypertext artist such as Michael Joyce, such biographical material would be so configured as I will discuss below. Hypertext, conceived of as an electronic patchwork quilt, as a text(of)tile(s), is a mosaic or collage of multimedia material whose patches are juxtaposed into patterns suggested by the memories storied in the patchwork-materials in concert with unique responses and "readings" of these materials by the quilt-maker/hypertext reader into whose hands these materials land.

Should you one day find yourself weaving your way through however many "patches" then constitute my Patchwork quilt, my hope is that you will discover for yourself, in the archive's endless dissemination of words, paintings, recordings, interviews, interpretations, reviews, assaults, castigations, deconstructions, and mystories, some node of intersection, or to paraphrase Robert Coover, "the allure of the blank spaces of [my] fabulous network" (Landow 105). And having arrived, as only whoever you think you are could have arrived, you will discover the eerie sensation, the biographer's nightmare, as feverishly declared in Patchen's Journal of Albion Moonlight: "You have read many books. This book is reading you" (202).

## CHAPTER 2 CONTRAST: MANIFESTO FOR A NEW ACADEMIC WRITING

The alphabet is euphoric: no more anguish of "schema", "no more rhetoric of "development," no more twisted logic, no more dissertations!

-Roland Barthes in Roland Barthes

Strength lies in improvisation. All the decisive blows are struck left-handed.

-Walter Benjamin in "One Way Street"

The question must be: What are the equivalents at the level of institutional practices and personal behavior of the convergence of electronic technologies?

-Gregory Ulmer in "One Video Theory"

### Ironies

We begin our journey to the CATT's (t)ale, the hypertext quilting of a post-structuralist anti-biography of Kenneth Patchen with a consideration of those elements of traditional literary discourse against which this project is to be contrasted. In Chapter 5 we will (T)arget literary biography principally as that institutional practice which our experiment in hobby theory is attempting re-create.

While the resulting Patchwork antibiography will be ahistorical in a Foucaultian sense, there is indeed a history to the emergence of hypertext and to its status, in Landow's terms, as the ideal laboratory for testing out certain formulations of post-structuralist literary theory. As we will discuss throughout and witness in the resulting (t)ale or de-monstration, Patchwork, the life and art of Kenneth Patchen provides, by way of homophony and the play of the signature effect, an analogy to the problematics of historiography, biography and representation, which have emerged out of the history of

communication from the oral tradition to what Ong refers to as the present period of secondary orality or the post-literate, electronic age.

We will examine certain "effects" of Patchen's writing practice that include a significant compendium of issues raised by the emergence of new discourses now taking shape in cyberspace via hypertext and CD-Rom computer generated technologies. Implicated here are the relationship between these technologies and post-structuralist theories that have influenced and shaped them and that may be further extended and explored by virtue of their invention.

A central irony that frames this enterprise lies at the heart of the mystorical thread that links my auto-biography to that of Patchen's bio-graphy. As we will later note, Patchen's anti-novelistic prose, his explorations in concrete poetry, poetry-jazz, experimental type and graphology, and collaborations with John Cage and other avant-garde artists, embodied as an artistic corpus the very sorts of deconstructive practices which marked the scars, wounds, gaps and fissures that plagued his physical body and psyche for most of his life. These deconstructive elements return, like the Freudian repressed, or the Lacanian *objet petit a*, as that which haunts my present attempt to represent this art and life.

Additional ironies abound. Patchen's anti-art, with its carnivalesque collaging of hybrid discourses, and its schizoid meeting of ideological and social practices, resulted in mixed and oftentimes conflicted reviews. And his long-standing impulse not to be "named" (despite, paradoxically, the ubiquitous presence of his trademark signature), or to be categorized as "Beat" or "proletarian," or any other such typology, as well as his general disdain for the academic critical enterprise of literary interpretation, has virtually

erased his name from the literary register and the indexes of contemporary anthologies. Nonetheless, as I will both argue and hope to demonstrate in Patchwork, that which is represented by a 'virtually' endless chain of signification, by the floating signifier of "Kenneth Patchen" as woven in multiple patchwork variations at the site of a "great quilting," as Nietzsche's site of "multiple exits and entrances," constitutes the "living-on" of the subject in a manner fitting the boundless nature of the consciousnesses that are patched together in his name.

And yet the reality of Patchen's legacy continues to haunt my present work in the form of the devalued currency which the name "Kenneth Patchen" represents to academic research and publishing. I pursue an interest in a marginalized subject and I desire to do so, following Derrida in Signsponge, in the key of Patchen, which is to say, represent the play of Patchen's signature in the form of a new academic writing that links the effects of his signature to the deconstructive elements potentialized in hypertext and multimedia.

We proceed, then, left-handedly toward the CATT's tale by first reviewing Landow's claim for hypertext as a laboratory for an experiment such as Patchwork. Having established the basis for legitimizing hypertext as a valid and useful invento for an alternative academic discourse, I will extend the argument specifically to literary biography-as-hypertext in Chapter 5 ("Target"). In the two bridge chapters, we will examine the importation of quilting as the hobby theory of choice for our experiment (Chapter 3, "Analogy") and the extension of the 'quilt' metaphor into the realm of electronic 'quilting', or hypertexting (Chapter 4, "Theory").

### Plugging in Patchen

What the Patchwork project represents is an argument by way of de-monstration for a new form of academic writing. The groundwork for this project has its roots, rhizometrically speaking, in the past and in the future. Indeed, we might suggest that this endeavor marks a return from the future anticipated by the past.

The problems of biographical representation which I began to consider in the early stages of my research on the life and art of Kenneth Patchen included a vast compendium of issues which have long plagued those disciplines and discourses which attempt to deal with such notions as "representation," "fact," "truth," "origin," "subject," "author," and the like. Historiography, anthropology, linguistics and literary theory, not to mention the sciences themselves, have all been scrutinized and re-considered in light of the shifting paradigms and new technologies of this century. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that biographical method should be similarly interrogated and that institutional discourses in literary biography should not likewise be re-considered and potentially re-configured.

While later chapters will consider the impact directly upon literary biography theory and practice, what I would like to review in this chapter are some of the essential concepts listed above ("representation," "fact," etc.) and how these concepts might be taken up and re-positioned in a post-alphabetic, electronically based literacy. In short, what aspects of my work on the Kenneth Patchen "archive" and its translation into a post-structuralist multimedia biography are most directly impacted by critical theory? And how might what Ulmer and others refer to as electronic thinking, or "videocy," the cognitive domain of Ong's period of "secondary orality," inform the shaping of this new academic discourse. If, as Landow suggests in Hypertext, multimedia and computer based texts are

the ideal lab for testing out certain aspects of critical theory, how, uniquely, might the generative powers embodied homonymically in the subject "Patchen," provide a tutor corpus (I use this term to reference both the literary and physical bodies of my "subject") for such a study?

The manifesto to emerge from this chapter is thus constructed as a series of contrasts to traditional academic discourse as practiced in the dissertation, the gate-keeping discourse, if you will, for the profession. I wish to highlight specifically those elements of this discourse which are relevant to Kenneth Patchen, my "subject" (the term itself an issue here), and to consider how these elements are impacted by the importation of this "subject" into the realm of the electronic.

The Status of the "Author" and "Subject"  
Will Be Re-visited and Re-Positioned in the Electronic

The details of Kenneth Patchen's art and life are an exemplar, if you will, of a long record of discussion concerning the nature of the subject in relationship to writing that dates back to antiquity. My interest in Patchen, virtually from my first encounter with his work, the anti-novel, The Journal of Albion Moonlight (1941), stemmed from the meta-levels of his hybrid discourse, what in Bahktinean terms would be its carnavalesque or dialogic qualities and in a Deleuzean sense, the schizoid nature of its narrative. "You have read many books," Albion tells us at one point in the randomly structured journal, "But this book is reading you" (xxx). While I can appreciate the levels at which this comment might have been directed toward his readers (or, as I will later argue, himself), the ramifications of such a line in terms of a signifying "play" of meaning both in his work and life are significant, I believe, beyond even the conscious intention of its scriptor.

If one adds to the self-consciousness of such lines, other qualities of the text, such as the use of parallel discourses printed in the margins of the book, the constant shifting of genre in the novel from Albion's tale, to journal entries, direct address to the reader, concrete poetry and the use of visual images as an element of the text's graphical structure and mnemonics, one begins to appreciate how this work, like others in the Patchen oeuvre, are linked both to the emergence of the book out of a pre-alphabetic tradition and to the return of the illuminated text as an electronic hypertext and multimedia.

What is essential to the premise of the Patchwork project is the critical linking of such aesthetic issues as the appearance and structure of the work with the formation of the "self," the "subject-who-writes," of the "author." The scattering effect of Patchen's Moonlight has implications not just for the schizoid narrator, but also for he who signs the book, the biographical Kenneth Patchen, as well as he who signs the book in his name, the reader of the text. That was the message in the bottle that surfaced in the fomenting waters of this biographer's dreams and ruminations. Just how is it that the 'floating signifier, "Kenneth Patchen," inscribed as a ludic play of multimedia impressions, typographies, drawings, jazz poems, etc., not to mention, from the biographer's perspective, the free-play of associations witnessed in his nonfiction writings and the proliferation of his image as a pop icon--contributes to the determination of meaning one might attach to the writer's name or signature?

In his letter dated February 5, 1930, written during his freshman year at the Andrew Micklejohn Experimental College to Isabel Stein, a former member of his high school poetry club, Patchen muses on the arbitrary nature of the alphabet and toys with the notion of randomly reassigning the designation of these signs. Having failed to cross a



"t," Patchen begins a reverie in which he decides, "I will use my own letters," and substitutes hieroglyphic like signs as an alternative code of communication. All the while, Patchen has been juxtaposing a parallel reverie in which he questions the status of the "snow" outside his window: "If you know what that means ["that" referring to his hieroglyphics] you could explain to me why it must snow on the ground today in order to have the ground covered with snow while the ground was covered with snow yesterday and it did not snow." The snow imagery here is reminiscent of the snowy flight into solipsism in Conrad Aiken's "Silent Snow, Secret Snow." Patchen closes by suggesting to Isabel: "Perhaps some day I will make a study of snow."

As I will later explore in the mystorical patch of the Patchwork quilt, Patchen's "snow" may be linked by way of the mnemonic system of Patchwork with the snow scene in Citizen Kane, in which snow functions as a moment of erasure for our twin subjects, Patchen/Kane. Earlier evidence for Patchen's anxiety about a life committed to language as a means of escaping a depressed youth can be found in his October 4, 1929, letter to Isabel in which he speculates with some fear and trepidation at the implications of dedicating himself to the possible self-destructive, or self-deconstructive, task of depending on language as the means by which to express, indeed, to create a less pained self. He informs Isabel that

Because of illness I did not start to school until I was eight years old and it was while I was sick that I had things read to me. I lived in an imaginary world and I believe sometimes that I never really left that world ("Letters")

Aware of critical nature of his decision, Patchen writes, "But say I shut out everything in my life but the pursuit of creative poetry and in the end find that it does not satisfy me then I'd feel that I had ruined my life for a silly whim." As we will explore by

way of the inter-textual weave of Patchwork, Patchen's concerns were well-founded, as indeed, there would be no borders between the "inside/outside" of his physical/literary corpus. The moment of prophecy arrives in the same letter, when Patchen reveals: "There is and has been something lacking in my life and I can't place it, I hate sentimental things and modern poetry seems to be nothing else and I'm at a loss."

That Patchen would establish himself as a writer of some of the mid-century's most popular love poems, while winning similar acclaim for his dark, surrealist anti-novels and absurdist prose, may be viewed less as a point of irony, but rather, as an expression of the carnivalesque, schizoid nature of a multifaceted subject-in-language, a "self" more written upon than written whose scattered patches we will "assemble edit" and re-edit via the apparatus of our biographical hypertext.

These early letters, with their strange markings, their phantasms of snow and shadow, their prescient foreshadowings of a haunting lack which no manner of expression could suture, could make whole, these "dead letters" are the ghost in our machine. Indeed, I would make the claim they are the ghost which our hypertext lab (if Landow and others are correct) is best suited to negatively re-present by way of the de-centered, fragmented, non-totalizing, disseminating qualities of the medium. In fact, "medium" here might be said to operate in its more "occult" "left-handed" fashion as that which marks a "lack," the "traces" of a subject conceived of as that which we invent as much out of desire, as out of a need to logically explain.

These letters are an heraldic moment in the poet's lifelong series of etchings on the mind's wall. I believe they reenact at the personal level what Havelock and Ong have charted in their writings as that critical passing from mythology to philosophy, from an

oral to a written culture. As Ulmer reminds us of this moment, the texts of Jacques Derrida "similarly already reflect an internalization of the electronic media, thus marking what is already at stake in the debate surrounding the closure of Western metaphysics" (Ulmer, Applied 303). While, according to Ulmer, Derrida's program "represents a deliberate choice to accept the new paradigm," in Patchen's case, I would argue the choice was less willed, less intentional, but certainly no less productive of a 'body' of work that is at once deconstructive, marginalized and pre-electronic.

And central to this program is the issue of the "signature" as a prominent feature of Patchen's art, the effects of which "signature" are to be related to the notion of the displaced or dis-remembered 'self, particularly as the 'self' or 'subject' might be displaced in the electronic paradigm.

The self as "an invention of Socratic vocabulary" becomes "textualized" by Plato and thus there emerges the "personality" of the person using the language, and this language, suggests Havelock, becomes "that level of theoretical discourse denoted by logos (Havelock, 1964). It is at this critical moment, argues Havelock that "a cleavage opened up, between theoretical discourse and the rhythmic narrative of oralism: the philosopher against the poets" (114). The conclusions which Havelock draws from this critical moment are central to the formation of my manifesto. Havelock writes,

The linguistic symptoms of this radical shift away from oralism, which has ever since underlain all European consciousness, occurred in a proliferation of terms, notions, and thoughts and thinking, for knowledge and knowing, for understanding, investigating, research, inquiry. (115)

The "symptoms" may be said to be largely felt in traditional academic discourse. It may also be said to characterize the life and work of Kenneth Patchen, seen as a valiant

explorer into the realm of this cleavage, and as a "potentiality," or doubly victimized "subject" of a research method (i.e., literary biography) itself contaminated by these very symptoms.

Our strategy for acknowledging the "linguistic symptoms" to which Havelock refers, for avoiding an academic apparatus that according to Derrida "consists of a mouth speaking--lecturing--an ear listening, in a literal way, a hand writing--the cultural machine of note-taking," is to change the apparatus (Ulmer, Teletheory, 160). Ulmer's contribution here is to propose extending "the intellectual senses--hearing and sight, knowledge from a distance--by means of audio-visual technologies" (Ulmer, Applied, 160). Ulmer cites Derrida's practice of otobiography, a "mixing of the modes of critique and fiction," as "demonstrating the possibility of applying literary devices to the practice of academic discourse" (160). Citing Derrida's Signsponge, a text "in which [Derrida] treats Ponge's oeuvre as if it were generated in the key of Ponge," Ulmer explains how such an experiment "includes one way to generalize a rhizomatic relation of the text to the world" (160). The existence of a "Patchen Homepage" on the web, consisting in July 1998 of some 110 links, or "threads" to use the textile metaphor associated with our hobby theory, suggests that the Patchwork quilters are already at work, the web already expanding rhizomatically in cyberspace. What will it mean to try and find "Patchen" in this endless chain of signifiers? What will it mean to "quilt" biographically with these "patches," in this space, collaboratively?

What Derrida finds in Ponge's discovery of the "science" of the signature is a production that celebrates "what a name founds, what may be found in a name" (161). Such a discovery leads Derrida to the conclusion that simply affixing a signature to the

end of a book does not constitute a "signing." The proper name "survives, lives-on," by virtue of a "transformation from singular reference to general concept." It is the proper name's "aleatoriness," its randomness and iterability, that interests Derrida. The proper name "becomes meaning once again, of limited range, once it is invested with semantic content. It starts to reenter the framework of a general science that governs the effects of the alea" (118,120). In our case, the proper name "Patchen" reenters through the framework of the hypertext quilt, a Derridean sifter of endlessly disseminating material. The mystorical thread here links, via puncept, Derrida's alea, which he finds "in the wing (aile) of "Hegel" to Robit-aile, two who may be said to have refused to sign. While Ponge singles out Hegel as a philosopher who refuses to sign, Ulmer, in Teletheory, suggests "he may stand in for academic writing as well" (163 T). What remains consistent throughout the employment of Derrida's signature procedure "is not the naming of a determinism, but an invention, inventio, whose purpose is to produce a text" (164).

Ulmer concludes his discussion on this subject with a paragraph that so comprehensively and succinctly summarizes the protocol for the Patchwork project that I cite it in full:

The places of memory in mystory, appropriating the signature, are organized into an alternative way to gather materials into a set—a sweep through the encyclopedia following the rhizome of the proper name as inventio. The signature may be a direct transposition of the proper name into a common noun (antonomasia), or it may be indirect, marked by a rhythm, a cadence, a fragmented image, a partial scene, a phrase, that repeats in the discourse, relating words to things and resulting in an intelligible collection. The story resulting from this series of juxtapositions constitutes a writing machine. The things generated in the third modality of the signature, that is, represent the model, the metaphors or vehicles for a poetics of invention, a memory system or mnemonics available for thinking about any matter whatsoever. The signature helps find the images of wide scope that make up the imagination (the image-repertoire) of the subject of knowledge, to be used in further research. (Teletheory 165)

What Ulmer presents here is an inventio for conducting and composing research in hypertext using the logic of the electronic. In the case of Patchwork, the proper noun "Patchen" is transposed into the common noun "patch" or "patching," terms shared by both the craft of patchwork quilting and the electronic "patch" of editing. Other connotations become available to the biographical/mystorical enterprise such as to "patch" a tear or rip in a garment, or to cover with a patch, either to conceal or mend. "Robitaille" is similarly linked, "rob(e)" suggesting the possibility of a "garment" or a "thief", and "taille," a reference to "tailor," to one who works with text(ile) materials, to a tax (collector?) Or, possibly, the reference might be to "tale" or "tail," reminding the biographer, thus, to cover his tail/tale, check his flanks, to be aware of a tale that is textualized, composed of many threads, "patched" from seemingly unrelated materials. I will discuss the relevance of the textile metaphor at length in Chapter Three ("Analogy") as it relates to quilting as hobby theory.

Ulmer's observation that the signature procedure, and the "models," "metaphors," and "vehicles" author-ized by this procedure constitute a "poetics," and that the resulting "collection" of items, signs, and materials that cluster in the subject's name are "intelligible," is a claim which I hope to confirm in Patchwork. Hypertext, whether in the context of CD-Rom multimedia or a Homepage on the WWW, does not have to be vacuous, the empty set that Roberts decries in his confessional article. Those who come to the "Patchwork quilt" and follow its threads, will, I believe, reflect upon the implications of the "patches" in their various juxtapositions, patterns and ludic associations, thus extending the possibilities of literary biography beyond the mere archiving of facts in a linear progression along a singular narrative and teleological path. Here they are more

likely to encounter the delirium, the madness that haunts a life, any life, and to enter the blissence, the carnivalesque and schizoid nature of "reality" in which the "truth" of the life becomes less important than workings of desire, of jouissance, of "living-on" in a (cyber)space beyond borders, in the "between" of the folds of a fabric of traces.

In the Electronic There Are No Origins and No Destinations and, Thus,  
"Thesis," "Truth" and the "Real" Are Reconsidered and Repositioned

The new academic discourse based on electronic logic is to be contrasted with a more traditional system of exclusion whose "will to truth," argues Foucault, "rests on an institutional support: it is both reinforced and renewed by whole strata of practices, such as pedagogy, of course; and the system of books, libraries; learned societies in the past and laboratories now" (55 Y). How do I escape the snares of this 'willed truth, the "obscurity of questioning" which, as Slavoj Zizek notes, "lays open, exposes, denudes its addressee . . . invades his sphere of intimacy" (179). It is a fear, as I will illustrate in my examination of the methodology and problematics of literary biography (Chapter 5, Target) with which every biographer, every author of a thesis-bound dissertation, must reckon.

Zizek, in his study on The Sublime Object of Ideology, turns to Lacan for a response to this issue. In his summary of Lacanian thinking, Zizek writes of this "'object in subject' which causes the presumptive knowledge" that, indeed, in Lacanian terms, "the Real cannot be inscribed, but we can inscribe this impossibility itself, we can locate its place: a traumatic place which causes a series of failures" (172). In terms of our translation of this understanding into the realm of the electronic, a "web" site which serves both as a Derridean 'sifter' of disseminating traces and of the Lacanian Real, we should, suggests

Zizek, be able to "encircle the void place of the subject through the failure of his symbolization, because the subject is nothing but the failure point of the process of his symbolic representation" (173).

In his commentary, Zizek draws a distinction between the Foucaultian notion of the subject "conceived as an effect of a fundamentally non-subjective process" and on Foucault's informed analysis of the "different modes by which individuals assume their subject-positions" and Lacan's notion of the subject. In the Lacanian perspective, explains Zizek,

... if we subtract all the richness of the different modes of subjectivity, all the fullness of experience present in the way individuals are "living" their subject positions, what remains is an empty place which was filled out with this richness, this original void, this lack of symbolic structure, is the subject, the subject of the signifier. (175)

What is critical for the purpose of "quilting" a Patchen Patchwork is an appreciation that "any surplus of signification masks a fundamental lack" (175). As we try to re-construct our subject out of the numerous and diverse materials left in the wake of our subject's passing into and through our shared constellation of 'floating signifiers, a constellation of material with which we are now signing in his name, we will be reminded by the logic of our electronic "quilt" that any such signifying practice is a failure and what inevitably remains is "a lack," a "void opened up by the failure is the subject of the signifier" (175).

The happy paradox as Zizek sees it, and which is relevant to the "productive" nature of our enterprise, is "how this negative, disruptive power, menacing our identity, is simultaneously a positive condition of it" (176). Zizek provides as an example of the 'negative of the negative, that of the Jew "experienced as the embodiment of negativity, as



the force disrupting stable social identity . . ." (176). But the " 'truth' of anti-Semitism," explains Žižek,

is, of course, that the very identity of our position is structured through a negative relationship to this traumatic figure of the Jew. Without reference to the Jew who is corroding the social fabric, the social fabric itself would be dissolved. In other words, all my positive consistency is a kind of "reaction formation" to a certain antagonistic, traumatic kernel: If I lose this impossible point of reference my very identity dissolves. (176)

Just who is reading this text, and to whose peril and dissolution? As I shall expand upon in later chapters, the implications of Žižek's reading of Lacan are critical to the restructuring of new academic discourse on the 'impossible' subject, Kenneth Patchen, seen as a de-monstration of the corrosive effect of a social fabric woven in the form of an electronic quilt. Such a "quilt" will be, by virtue of its unique logic and construction, a text in which " antagonism is always a kind of opening, a hole in the field of the symbolic Other, a void," writes Žižek, "of an unanswered, unresolved question . . ." (177).

In my later examination of various "patches" in the Patchen archive, we will note how our bio-graphical "subject" shared the status of the Jew, the antagonistic and problematic Other. In categories ranging from anti-novelist to anti-American, from the agency of disorder in art to self-deconstructive back patient, attempts to locate the "Real" nature of Patchen's tortured corpus have resulted in his being delegated to the status of a Jew wandering in the margins of contemporary art and literature. The truth of the "Real" which Patchwork attempts both to acknowledge and incorporate as its poetics is the possibility of a double victimization which a more traditional academic discourse on such a life would engender. For as Žižek points out: ". . . as soon as the subject is caught in the radically external signifying network, he is mortified, dismembered, divided" (173). Were I

to follow the lead of those who have previously attempted to 'formulate' my "subject," like Eliot's Prufrock "stuck upon a pin," I would nail the same nails into the same "sign" of his cross.

Writes Zizek, "The subject is always fastened, pinned, to a signifier which represents him for the other, and through this pinning he is loaded with a symbolic mandate, he is given a place in the subjective network of symbolic relations" (113). Such a network is the thesis-framed, linear narrative of the traditional literary biography. The question before us is what happens when that network becomes a CD-Rom hypertext with a World Wide Web interface, a text without closure or singular author-ship sensitive to the effects of chaotic "strange attractors" whose seemingly minor and unpredictable inputs can yield equally unpredictable and often significant outputs?

#### The New Electronic Academic Discourse Will Be Non-Totalizing

Patchen's open-ended anti-novel, The Journal of Albion Moonlight, 'concludes' with the lines: "There is no way to end this book. No way to begin" (313). Lacking the close punctuation of a period, the structure of this text, with its multiple discourses, beginnings and endings, repeats a pattern found throughout the Patchen corpus, in which both the art and the physical person of the author resisted totalization, unification. From the refusal to assume a singular identity in a specific artistic niche (e.g. "Beat poet") or political (e.g., "Socialist") stance, to the surgery defying attempts to fuse his fissured spine, every aspect of the "corpus" is marked by lines of fracture and scarification.

In writing of Bakhtin's relationship to Joyce, Brandon Kershner suggests: "Bakhtin is not, except in patches (my underline), systematic" (20). In composing Patchwork in the 'key of Patchen, the attempt is to engage the subject by way of de-monstration, by

employing the systematics of electronic logic which is constructed in patches. The resulting text, like Patchen's Moonlight, has no end and fulfills the Bahktinian promise of an 'outlaw language' (20). Adds Kershner, "... the thrust of [Bahktin's] ideas is generally to deny the desirability or even the possibility of erecting totalizing systems. For him, there is no 'last word'" (20).

We find another precedent for such resistance to finality in the tradition of rabbinical interpretation. In her chapter on "Some Philosophical Aspects of the Rabbinical Interpretive System" in The Slayers of Moses, Susan Handleman outlines a tradition of the open, non-totalizing text the practice of Rabbinical interpretation and midrash, to the work of Barthes and "Reb" Derrida. In so doing, she cites Edward Said's Beginnings in which Said discusses four "conventions" to be found in Freud's Interpretation of Dreams where the psychoanalyst "avoided certain specific textual conventions which the classical novel had employed" (78 Handleman). Handleman employs Said's analysis "as a way of contrasting Rabbinical concepts of narrative and interpretation with classical notions (78).

Handleman notes of Said's analysis of Freud, that Freud's "non-mimetic approach . . . does not follow linear progression but leads to multiple and endless interpretations," a characteristic that Handleman finds is also "true of Rabbinical interpretation" (79). Handleman observes in the "colloquy of voices in the Midrash or Talmud" that the "interpretive process is collective" and she acknowledges the extension of this tradition in the work of Barthes and Derrida. She cites the following lines from Barthes's The Pleasure of the Text, lines that echo those cited earlier from Patchen's Moonlight. "The text," writes Barthes, "is a fetish object, and this fetish desires me" (23).

"This book is reading you," writes Patchen, a line that haunts the biographer and implicates the reader in the "production" rather than the "representation" of its meaning.

Again, I cite Handleman's analysis of Barthes, since the language quoted here is so suggestive of the logic and structures of electronic discourse and of Patchwork :

In Barthes's view, reading should be in the nature of a step-by-step commentary, a process of "decomposition" of the text, a "systematic use of digression," "a cutting of the text into contiguous fragments," "manhandling the text, interrupting it": that is to say, playing with its infinite possibilities. (80)

Such, of course, is Barthes's practice in S/Z, his "decomposition" of Balzac's Sarrasine. It has also been Derrida's practice, as, for example, in Glas, where the influence of chance and necessity produced by homophony or homonymy, result in a similarly non-totalizing paradigm that, as Ulmer suggests, "automatically locates all equivocality" (47 AG).

In its critique of Derrida's deconstructive practice, Ulmer's analysis is attentive to concepts and terminology which reference the electronic dimension of Derrida's discourse, and, by way of extension, to the textile metaphor which "patches" Derrida to Patchen to Robitaille. Derrida's "différance," a "sameness which is not identical" is characterized as a "movement" that is "virtual," like the "moire effect in op writing" (47 AG). In Glas, Derrida writes, "Each cited word gives an index card or a grid [grille] which enables you to survey the text. It is accompanied by a diagram which you ought to be able to verify at each occurrence" (Glas, 223). Ulmer notes that Derrida names this movement in Glas "la navette" (shuttle, referring to the 'to and fro' motion which bears this name in weaving, sewing, and transportation)" (47). I will discuss in further detail the relationship of Derrida's language and practice as it relates to Patchwork in Chapter 3 (ANALOGY). In brief, what interests me here is Derrida's productive employment of the textile metaphor

seen as "the interlacing stitching of sewing" (47). The invention that is thus generated by the signature "Patchen" informs the design of a new discourse written in the 'key' of his name, one that takes on the problematics of inside-outside, of totalization, of traditional academic discourse, representation and the very certainty of one's own name.

Electronic Discourse Will Introduce  
Alternative Structures and Organizational Patterns

It has already become apparent that organizational structures associated with print and the 'square' versus the 'round' book are being replaced by structures informed and shaped by the logic of emerging computer technologies. This moment has not arrived without its critics and legitimate grounds for concern. Paul Roberts's expressions of concern cited in my Introduction, the fear that the navigable structures of hyper-media are controlling and reductive, are widely felt. Such paths, writes media theorist, David Rokeby, "range from the latticework of a regular and highly interconnected network, to the single serial path of a narrative" (138). Metaphors for these paths range from that of the "map" to the "labyrinth." But the merits of following such hyper-media pathways can be viewed as both liberating and constraining. As Rokeby warns his readers,

It's a mistake to conclude that by presenting a variety of perspectives, the artist is being objective and disinterested. Through the selection of the specific points of view offered, how they are linked together, and the design of the method of navigation, the artist holds significant power, which is enhanced by this apparent objectivity. (140)

The challenge, therefore, of Patchwork, an investigation into the problematics of biographical representation after post-structuralism, is to identify structural models that incorporate, as part of their invention, something other than the limited and dictatorial paths from factotum to factotum that characterize most commercial and many

academically based CD-Roms. Such models should not be a mere replication of the teleologically influenced maps which guide the viewer through an information field towards certain thesis-centered and authorized "truths."

Rather, we should be identifying those metaphors, models and strategies which Landow argues are inherently linked to post-structuralist thought and which render hyper-media an ideal lab for their exploration. This means, frankly, extending invention beyond that demonstrated by such Landow inspired projects as the Dickens Web, which functions largely as a open-ended compendium of Dickensonia, and which does not, by way of its design or poetics, either radically reposition its "subject," or transform its subject into an agent for the production of a new text written, say, in the "key of Dickens."

I have already referred to a number of such structures that date from antiquity and of the development of the illuminated texts of medieval tradition. To appreciate the relationship of these texts to the logic and organization of electronic discourse is to recognize the centrality of memoria, the power and functioning of memory, in these textual systems.

In The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture (1990), Mary Carruthers writes that "Memoria meant, at that time, trained memory, educated and disciplined according to a well developed pedagogy that was part of the elementary language arts--grammar, logic, and rhetoric" (7). In this discipline material was "divided . . . into pieces short enough to be recalled in single units and to key them into some sort of rigid, easily reconstructable order" (7). Carruthers reports that such discipline depended upon what Hugh of St. Victor, writing in the early twelfth century, identified as "the mnemonic utility of manuscript page layout and decoration" (9).

Patchen's multimedia art has been variously recognized and praised for celebrating the spirit and poetics of the "illuminated text," or, to use Patchen's own term, an "art of engagement." To which I would add, to "engage" the senses in a variety of discourses and artistic media. From the attention to typographic detail in the early prose and poetry, to the later "painted poems," concrete poetry, silk-screens, and poetry jazz, whatever one deemed to be the "subject" of Patchen's discourse, this "subject" found expression in a multi-form and polyvocal corpus, further evidence, if you will, of Patchen's unbounded signifying practice.

Writing of the diversity of such a signifying practice in medieval literature, Carruthers comments,

I want to distinguish very carefully here between pictorial" and "visual." Memories could be marked by pictorial means; the ancient system described in Rhetorica ad Herennium was precisely that. But pictures are not the only sorts of objects we can see. We also see written words and numbers, punctuation marks, and blotches of color; if we read music, we can see it as the notes on the staff; if we play the piano by ear, we can see music as the position of our fingers. Moreover, we can manipulate such information in ways that make it possible to bring together or separate in a variety of ways, to collate, classify, compose, and sort it in order to create new ideas and deconstruct old ones. (18-19)

Carruther's above description of information "manipulation" and composition production is strikingly similar to that of hypermedia, and to the poetics and electronic logic to be utilized in Patchwork. Carruther's research shares with Gregory Ulmer's "applied grammatology" the understanding that, to quote Carruthers: "All mnemonic organizational schemes are heuristic in nature. They are retrieval schemes, for the purpose of inventio or 'finding'"(20).

To employ such an inventio in the context of an electronic post-structuralist hypermedia biography will be the extended subject of the chapters to follow. It is here, in

this chapter's manifesto for a new electronic academic discourse, that I wish to establish the historical basis for such a project. And Carruthers's commentary, particularly her opening chapter on "Models for the Memory," assists us in tracing these roots.

Among the other observations she makes relevant to this study are the following. Memory images, recalling Aristotle's analysis, can function "like an imprint in us [and] can also cause us to remember 'what is not present'" (23). With regard to the issue of totality and representation, Carruthers points out that: "Partialness is also a characteristic of memory" (25). Concerning the role of homophony, she adds, "The earliest Greek memory test we possess, a pre-Socratic fragment called Dialexis, relies upon a sort of visualized homophony, in its advice about memorizing for both 'words and things'" (28).

And in a critical passage, Carruthers links the remembering process to that of computer based technologies. "The ancients and their medieval heir," suggests Carruthers, "thought that each 'bit' of knowledge was remembered in a particular place in the memory . . ." (28). She adds that

The words topos, and locus used in writings on logic and rhetoric as well as on mnemonics, refer fundamentally to physical locations in the brain, which are made accessible by means of an orderly system that functions somewhat like a cross between the routing systems used by programs to store, retrieve, merge, and distinguish the information in a computer's memory, and postal addresses or library shelf-marks. (29)

Until recently there has been no serious attempt to import the logic, rhetoric and grammar of the electronic into the realm of nonfiction and academic discourses. It has been the hybrid discourses of Derrida, Foucault and Barthes, for example, that have inspired tele-theorists such as Gregory Ulmer, in a series of works beginning with Applied Grammatology, and more recently in Teletheory and Heuretics, to mine the possibilities of



critical theory as the source for a new poetics for hypermedia. Two of Ulmer's major inventions, mystory and the CATTt, referred to in my Introduction, serve as structural agents for Patchwork.

Robert Ray, Ulmer's colleague in the Media Studies Program at the University of Florida, has recently published The Avant-Garde Finds Andy Hardy (Harvard, 1995), a work that provides, perhaps, the best and most thorough attempt to redefine and rewrite academic discourse--in this case, by "reinventing film studies." In declaring that "film studies is dead," Ray postulates that he is "not," in fact, "against the application of sophisticated semiotic, ideological and psychoanalytic methods" in academic writing, but, argues Ray, "We know in advance where such analysis will lead, and thus even the most skilled of such efforts will achieve very little 'information'" (6). Ray's corrective to the "automatic pilot" of such discourses is "to consider, as an alternative practice, 'that branch of the humanities which, since the nineteenth century, has functioned as the equivalent of science's pure research: the avant-garde'" (10). Citing the examples of Apollinaire, Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, Marcel Duchamp, André Breton, John Cage and others, Ray builds upon a rich historical precedent for "evidence of the avant-garde-as-research" (13).

Of equal significance for my study is Ray's linkage of the avant-garde-as-research to the work of Jacques Derrida, by way of Eric Havelock, Jack Goody and Walter Ong, whose works examine the transition from "the alphabetic to 'cinematic' or 'electronic'" (14). Ray's stated purpose for 'writing' about Andy Hardy is "to provide a means for bringing film criticism into some sort of relationship with communications technologies revolutionizing everyday life." Ray emphatically adds, "... far from being useless, the experimental arts amount to a 'workshop for potential criticism'" (16).

What Ray proposes for film criticism is analogous to that which Patchwork proposes for biographical criticism as another form of academic discourse. Acknowledging that "artists don't have to explain what they do," Ray argues that "although Andy Hardy must at first give way to the theoretical accounts which will represent him . . . experiments involving the Hardy movies bring him increasingly forward" (17). This is a significant claim and one I would similarly make for Patchwork. In the latter case, the materials include those of literary biography as applied to a multimedia artist. Thus, my experiments, such as testing out Ulmer's "CATTt," (itself an avant-garde intervention cited by Ray in his own study), involve the application of the avant-garde-as-research to the full range of the biographical archive: prose, poetry, multimedia art, correspondence, reviews, scholarship, etc. In so doing, Patchen, the biographical "subject," is brought forward, not in the traditional sense of "unified" or "Real," but, rather, as the agency of a production author-ized by the circulation of his signature through a series of electronic "patches."

Structurally, Ray serves up a range of forms, the fragment, "writing's equivalent of the photograph," being the most recurrent. Using models of the fragment, such as Barthes's anecdotal Roland Barthes, and John Cage's experimental (and anecdotal) lectures, Ray organizes his text in such a fashion, recognizing, as he does, say, with Cage, that this structure's "determined discontinuity, non-teleological structure, and obvious strangeness . . . represents its subject matter" (22). Patchen's own collaboration with Cage in the 1942 Columbia Radio Workshop production of Patchen's "The City Wears a Slouch Hat" provides this project a more immediate legitimization for the importation of Cagian poetics into the Patchwork design.

Other surrealist interventions with the Andy Hardy material include the reliance on recombination and juxtaposition, and, after Benjamin, "the flaneur's . . . preference for drifting" (43). From Barthes, Ray imports the use of a fragmented structure in the form of lexias, "arbitrary blocks" that I will call "patches" in my quilt. These, suggests Ray, function as "mini-essays ('divigations') and result in "a new kind of critical writing" (97).

What Ray finds so interesting about, say, Breton's surrealist Manifesto, or Barthes's S/Z, is "how ill prepared most academics are to deal with departures from the conventional essay" (98). To demonstrate his point, Ray models Chapter Six, "The Alphabet," after Roland Barthes, Barthes's auto-biography consisting of a series of alphabetized fragments. What Ray adopts from Barthes, Barthes, we are told, found in Nietzsche's "aphoristic books" which, Ray observes, are "so perfectly adapted to what Gilles Deleuze has called 'nomad thought'" and which is structured in the mode of a "digression" (121).

Nomadic thought, of course, "anticipates the nature of cyberspace," and for Ray, this becomes yet another justification for its importation into film studies. Is this not, Ray argues by way of illustration, the poetics of Godard's Two Or Three Things I Know About Her? Such "poetic thinking [which]...regards every object as a potential metaphor" is familiar to every user of computer software. And yet, laments Ray, "film criticism has been slow to adopt to this method" (123). Ray, however, is not so reluctant, and thus he develops his chapter with a series of such digressive entries.

If one conceives, therefore, of a crazy quilt composed in such a fashion, woven of "patches" of materials circulating nomadically through the cyber-archive, being sifted through the Derridean dissemination machine, coming under the influence of "strange

attractors," and endlessly recombining into new quilts bearing the signature effect of their "subject," one begins to imagine how such a textual practice might depart from the structure of the traditional academic essay.

That such works should be viewed by their critics as lacking structure, as exhibiting a troublesome disorder, would come as no surprise to this writer, after examining the record provided by the Patchen archive. For as we will note below, the archive contains sufficient evidence of the extent to which Patchen's critics either often dismissed his seemingly disordered art out of hand, or, as in the case of his supporter and lifelong publisher, James Laughlin, attempted, for the good of some supposed "order," to rewrite The Journal of Albion Moonlight, Patchen's most deliberately disordered and acclaimed work.

Thus, before concluding this chapter's manifesto for a new academic writing, let us examine one further dimension of our alternative discourse, that being the relationship between structure, disorder and ideology. To write in the "key of Patchen" will necessitate that we incorporate into the composition of our "quilt," recognition of the manner in which the "order" claimed for, or demanded of, the works "signed" by the "subject" of a literary biography are, to quote Machéry, "merely an imagined order, projected on to disorder, the fictive resolution of ideological conflicts, a resolution so precarious that it is obvious in the very letter of the text where incoherence and incompleteness burst forth" (Machéry 194).

#### The Question of Ideology Must Be Revisited and Reconfigured in the Electronic

Among the many factors that recommend Kenneth Patchen as a tutor subject for the purposes of a deconstructive anti-biography are the circumstances that serve as a case

study of what Althusser calls the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA). The influence of the ISA begins with "an academic or schooling practice which defines both the conditions for the consumption of literature and the very conditions of its production also" (Balibar 84). From cradle to grave, Patchen was enmeshed in the workings of the ISA.

Patchen, the noted "poet-of-the-steelworks," was, from his first youthful days of reading, a regular patron of the Warren, Ohio Library, built, ironically, with funding from the Carnegie steel empire. It was here that the young writer sought his escape from the depressing conditions of his steeltown existence, conditions caustically recalled in his poetic recounting of the soot-covered fate of his "Orange Bear" (Collected Poems 384). Sequestered in the halls that industry built, Patchen read his Blake and began to view his slag infested environs through the industrial haze of Blake's "London".

By the time Patchen had reached Cambridge, Massachusetts, as a new poetic voice in the late 20's, he had already become one of the recognized representatives of American proletarian verse. At Random House, publisher Bennett Cerf was looking to publish just such a poet and Patchen was offered his first book contract. That first collection of poems, Before The Brave (1933), with its symbolic "red" cover, included the poet's most ideologically conspicuous language, a veritable lexicon of socialist jargon, which the poet immediately attempted to distance himself from, together with the tags and reputation associated with being a poster boy for leftist political causes.

We will return to this and other of Patchen's ideologically influenced works in more detail below. What I wish to note here is why the question of ideology is important to a post-structuralist biography and how the treatment of the ideological component of such a biography will be reconfigured and repositioned in an electronic discourse. For

what I wish to avoid here is the hermeneutic trap of trying to "fix" my subject in a given ideological position or category. Given that Patchen was the victim of such analytical dissection in life, I do not wish to once again resurrect his corpus, only to further assign him away to the taxonomies provided by disciplinary authority. And so I search for models of alternative approaches to this subject of knowledge. Specifically, I search for models that can be adopted to the structures and logic of an electronic "patchworking."

I will introduce four such theorists and their models here that will later be amplified and de-monstrated in the chapters below. These models include Althusser's ISA, Bakhtin's notions of dialogism, polyphony, carnival and ideologemes, Ulmer's teletheory and its representation in mystory, and Zizek's ideological quilt.

From Althusser's writings in "Freud and Lacan" comes the suggestion "that the human subject is decentered, constituted by a structure which has no 'center' either, except in the ideological formulations in which it recognizes itself" (Kershner 188-89). Surrounded as he was by warring ideological forces trying to lay claim for "Patchen" in their name, Patchen, like so many other victims of literary biography, has always been at the mercy of, to use Althusser's term, the "unconscious." Which is to say "unconscious" to the fact that their conception of the "subject" arrives in the form of "structures" of the unconscious which are seldom understood as such, but which nevertheless shape their minds and their attempts to anchor the floating signifier, say "Kenneth Patchen," at some fixed point along its path of circulation.

As Althusser points out in his essay, "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus," this process works in its "disguised" and "symbolic" form through popular forms of electronic communications such as radio and television, usually with the effect of

valorizing the dominant ideology in control of these very technologies. Thus, our goal is to redirect these technologies, to effect a detournment in which the potentials of deconstruction and dissemination inherent in hypermedia and cyber-discourse, unravel the weave of our collected "patches" and expose the manner in which their variously ideological and "structured" meanings may have been "knotted" by other patch-workers up and down the signifying chain.

Thus, Althusser's understanding of how various repressive apparatus are complicit in the ideological formation of the subject, and of the linkage of this process to popular communications technologies, underlies the present study, in that one of the aims of this experimental anti-biography is to expose, like the undraped Oz, the workings of this apparatus. In so doing, we will explore the ability of new, computer-based discourses to demystify ideological content and reveal the workings of the "political unconscious."

The importance of the works of M.M. Bakhtin for this study derive from his concepts of dialogism and carnilvalization. In importing Bakhtin for this project, I am following the lead of R. B. Kershner, whose study, Joyce, Bakhtin, and Popular Literature (University of North Carolina Press, 1989) has shed considerable light on the use of popular literature in Joyce's works. While I would not claim for Patchen the significance and influence which Joyce represents for this century, I would argue that the usefulness of the theoretical approach provided by Bakhtin, and the similarity of stylistic and ideological elements in the works of Joyce and Patchen, recommend a Bakhtinian approach to our study.

Like Joyce, Patchen's prose and poetry exhibits what Kershner, citing Bakhtin, describes as "a great variety of conflicting variants--languages of officialdom, vernacular,

occupational jargon, technical, literary, and sub-literary, all polyphonically resounding" (15). Identifying "heteroglossia" as the "condition of our existence," "dialogism," suggests Kershner, "is the necessary mode of knowledge in such a world, a form of relationship between or among different languages that, like dialectics, defines a sort of logic" (16).

The logic identified here may be said to be found in electronic, hypertext discourse and in the collaborative composition potentialized in hypertext and cyberspace. The novel, and particularly the sort of anti-novel represented by Patchen's The Journal of Albion Moonlight, fulfills the description of "metagenre" that, explains Kershner, "overtakes (or 'novelizes') such other genre as romantic poetic narrative, because it is dialogical can take no final shape, but is in a process of continuous metamorphosis" (17). To write, thus, of Patchen in the 'key of Patchen' would be to import such a poetics--a poetics already anticipated by, and inherent in, electronic multimedia discourse.

And there is, as suggested earlier, an ideological component to Bakhtin's thought. In "Marxism and the Philosophy of Images" Bakhtin writes that: "The logic of consciousness is the logic of ideological communication, of semiotic interaction of a social group. If we deprive consciousness of its semiotic, ideological content, it would have absolutely nothing left" (Bakhtin 13). If we take this notion into consideration in the context of literary biography, particularly that woven as a patchwork of juxtaposed and polyphonous, fragmentary voices, the resulting text would be less the mirroring of a univocal or "dominant voice," but rather, as Kershner so ascribes to Bakhtin, "a polyphony of voices of opposition, voices of local dominance and local opposition, voices inserted at odd angles to the major debates . . ." (21). In short, a crazy quilt--anti-biography as hypertext.



If Althusser provides us with a model of the ideological apparatus from which our post-structuralist biographical subject is to be freed, and Bakhtin a model for the biographical subject conceived as a dialogic, polyphonous voice speaking in "ideologemes" from the pages of carnivalesque texts, where might we now turn to situate such conceptions in an electronically configured logic and discourse? Gregory Ulmer's development of teletheory, which he refers to as "the application of grammatology to television in the context of schooling," has led to his invention of the mystory, a "specific genre . . . designed to do the work of schooling and popularization in a way that takes into account the new discursive and conceptual ecology interrelating orality, literacy and video" (Teletheory, vii). Within mystory, the question of ideology becomes the subject of both investigation and exposure. Ulmer cites a number of influential sources whose focus has been "the emotional dimension of comprehension" (109). Ulmer refers to several theorists whose writings underscore the role of "narrative pleasure" seen as "one way to locate the pleasure-in-recognition central to the maintenance and persistence of ideological formation" (106). He points to the work of film theorist Bill Nichols which explores the diegetic effect of film narrative, an effect that causes us to "see through the perceptual habit and the image's construction to an already meaningful world (without, in this case, 'seeing through' the deception that is involved, the actual production of fabrication of meaning" (Nichols, 1981: 38). Citing Wittgenstein's The Brown Book as a mystorical model, Ulmer claims the function of mystory as a new form of pedagogy is "to teach this elusive illusion upon which is based the misrecognition 'that traps us within an imaginary realm of identity and opposition governed by desire to be what we are not and to possess what cannot be 'had'" (42). The significance here to an anti-biography-as-

hypertext, is that in contrast to the traditional practice of the biographical essay, with its dependence on solving the problem of explaining away the "truth" of a "subject" in the form of an argument, or thesis, the mystory, as Ulmer asserts with a nod to Wittgenstein "makes thinkable the possibility of a writerly essay that could reason in the absence of argument and problem" (109).

Such a turn in the direction of a "writerly" biographical narrative, would constitute for biography the parallel status of "alternative historiography" which Ulmer claims for mystory. Calling The Brown Book "a kind of film" and Barthes's use of "poses" in The Lover's Discourse: Fragments, a "new rhetoric . . . that reflects cinematic thinking," Ulmer points to the use of the punctum as a "mnemonic technique" whose "sting" is an emotional response to certain details "expressed in an image" (110). The crucial element here is that the "referent of this story cannot be denoted, but only connoted" (111). And, thus, in contrast to the usual mandate to revive the past as it actually was, memory, that moment of recognition triggered by the sting of the punctum is 'seized', suggests Walter Benjamin in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," as it "flashes up at a moment of danger" (111). What follows in mystory, explains Ulmer, is that this "punctum of emotional recognition is put to work in the service of invention, bringing to bear on disciplinary problems the images and stories of autobiography" (111).

The mystory that shapes Patchwork will be developed at length in Chapter 6: (t)ale. It is a mystory that links its cosigners, Patchen/Robitaille, both homonymically by way of the puncept, but also by way of the punctum, and the sting of co-mingled memory. Indeed, the triggering device is the scene of two catastrophes, two deaths. For Patchen, it is the return of the repressed memory of his beloved sister's untimely death when struck by

an automobile. For Robitaille, it is haunting memory of his first recollected exposure to death, in the form of a televised skit on NBC's Today program, in which host Dave Garraway is "seemingly" flattened by a steam roller on the streets of New York. The amplification effect of these memories, the perpetual sting of their punctum, becomes one of the threads woven through the fabric of the Patchwork quilt. As Ulmer describes this process: "Mystory attempts to be the genre of transmission, which comes into proper perspective in relating catastrophic time to the time of invention" (112). The "patches" of my quilt, like Barthes's "poses" or album "snapshots," become the juxtaposed fragments by which the crafter of the quilt directs his attention not at the object of knowledge, but at the "subject," the anti-biographer whose "double inscription," in Lacanian terms, allows the quilter to take into his account his own desire, the erotic pleasure he takes-- Barthes's fetishistic lover "mutilating" his beloved. My desire for "knowledge" of Patchen is not unassociated with my own fantasy life, and in this sense the act of quilting becomes the scene of a transference, an element usually repressed in academic literary biography but made manifest in the mnemonic autoportrait that is mystory.

As our bridge to Chapter Three, "(A)nalogy," which will examine the parallels between the theory and craft of patchwork quilting and "quilting" as a metaphor for doing theory, let us consider the last of our models for re-positioning ideology in the electronic: Slavoj Zizek's analysis of the "The Ideological 'Quilt'" in The Sublime Object of Ideology (Verso, 1989).

Zizek begins his discussion of the "ideological 'quilt'" with a question of considerable interest to this study: "What creates and sustains the identity of a given

ideological field beyond all possible variations of its positive content?" Zizek turns to Lacan for the answer to this "crucial" question, stating,

The multitude of "floating signifiers," of proto-ideological elements, is structured into a unified field through the intervention of a certain 'nodal point' (the Lacanian point de capiton) which 'quilts' them, stops their sliding and fixes their meaning. (87)

As an illustration of the "non-bound, non-tied elements" of such an ideological space, Zizek considers the subject of ecologism which is not determined in advance but can be variously posited as "conservative," "socialist," "state-oriented," etc., depending on the "totalization" performed by the "quilting" of these otherwise "free-floating . . . ideological elements" (87). As we will become apparent in the chapters to follow, the Patchen archive is replete with examples of 'nodal points, points de capiton, which have totalized the various "floating signifiers" clustering around the Patchen "signature." The resulting series of "equivalences" include: Communist, Socialist, anti-capitalist, anti-war activist, nihilist, Beat, romantic, environmentalist, pop surrealist, and the list goes on.

But as Zizek points out, such an "enchainment is possible only on condition that a certain signifier--the Lacanian 'One'-'quilts' the whole field, and, by embodying it, effectuates its identity" (88). Zizek finds the prescription for being able to "formulate the determining role of a certain particular domain without falling into a trap of essentialism" in the "anti-descriptivism" of Saul Kripke. (89) Kripke's theory is suggested of Patchen's youthful experiment with deconstructing the alphabet mentioned earlier. The fate of identity is implicated in the act of naming, a realization that haunted Patchen, even as it now haunts his biographer.

Zizek begins with an "elementary" question: "How do names refer to the objects they denote?" The "descriptivist" answer is that:

... every word is, in the first place, the bearer of a certain meaning--that is, it means a cluster of descriptive features ("table" means an object of a certain shape, serving certain purposes) and subsequently refers to objects in reality in so far as they possess properties designated by the cluster of descriptions. (89)

One is reminded here of the B.C. cartoon in which one character asks the other why the large, trunked object before them is called an "elephant." To which the other responds:

"Because it looks like an elephant!"

The anti-descriptivist answer, as Zizek states it, is,

that a word is connected to an object or a set of objects through an act of "primal baptism," and the link maintains itself even if the cluster of descriptive features which initially determined the meaning of the word changes completely. (90)

That the above can be as true for proper nouns, as for common, is clearly illustrated in Patchen's inability to untie himself, for example, from the knot, the nodal point of "Communist" long after abandoning the descriptive features of the appellation.

Patchen, indeed any potential subject of literary biography, can be a victim of what Zizek refers to as "the dogmatic stupidity proper to a signifier as such, the stupidity which assumes the shape of a tautology: a name refers to an object because the object is called that"--a point comically rendered in the B.C. strip.

The impact of this "tautology" on Patchen, or on any such subject, can be more tragic than comic. Zizek's example of the case of the "Jew" serves to emphasize this point. In this instance "'Jew' appears as a signifier connoting a cluster of supposedly effective properties (intriguing spirit . . .)" but through a process of inversion the subject becomes

"greedy . . . because they are Jews" (96). Žižek suggests the following Lacanian gloss for this insidious phenomenon:

The points de capiton is the point through which the subject is 'sewn' to the signifier, and at the same time the point which interpolates individual into subject by addressing it with the call of a certain master signifier ('Communism', 'God', 'Freedom', America)--in a word--it is the point of the subjectivation of the signifier's chain" (101).

I will go into greater detail below as to the precise manner in which Lacanian analysis relates to the composition of the Patchwork "quilt." For the moment, it is sufficient to recall Žižek's observation that: "The subject is always formulated, pinned, to a signifier which represents him for the other, and through the pinning he is loaded with a symbolic mandate, he is given a place in the intersubjective network of symbolic relations" (113). The Patchen archive may, thus, be conceived retrospectively and futuristically as such a network wired electronically. Novelist Russell Hoban, in correspondence with this writer, referred to this phenomenon as a sort of "circuitry of the world mind" (Hoban). This network is perceived experientially as the rapidly growing series of "links" summoned by the WWW browsers--a network that invites the Patchen fantasist to enter, in Žižek's words, "an imaginary scenario filling out the void, the opening of the desire of the Other" (114). Let us imagine ourselves then, as invitees to the craft of quilting. What does the rich tradition of this craft tell us about the possibility of critical theory and post-structuralist biographical discourse?

### CHAPTER 3 (A)NALOGY: QUILTING AS HOBBY THEORY

The second stage of the CATTt is that of (A)nalogy, intended to represent formation and displacement. Patchwork demonstrates the (A)nalogy of the CATT(t) by incorporating as part of its inventio the use of Ulmer's hobby theory. As a tool for the implementation of heuretics ("a brand of logic that treats the art of discovery or invention"), hobby theory or theory craft "popularizes" theory by re-conceiving it as a craft or hobby. In his "Handbook For A Theory Hobby," Ulmer predicts "that the day will come when theory will be produced as a craft in the manner of woodworking, gourmet cooking, photography, or karate" (400). To which I would add: theory in the manner of patchwork crazy quilting.

In fact, I would extend Landow's argument that hypertext is the ideal laboratory for conducting experiments in post-structuralist theory, by suggesting that the history of patchwork crazy quilting as a craft anticipates and demonstrates by way of analogy, the theoretical potentialities for hypertext a century in advance. Evidence to support this claim can be found both in the history of invention relevant to both modes of expression, as well as in the language employed to explain their methodologies.

Consider what we know about the history and craft of patchwork crazy quilting. The emergence of the craft is marked, for example, by the quality of its randomness and accidental nature. According to quilt historian, Delores Hinson, "The earliest quilts, called crazy quilts, were more a result of accident than of design" (21). Indeed, the genesis of

this craft in the late 1800's during the period of Victorian propriety and decorum, was, like so many other 'against the grain' practices of this epoch, a deconstructive enterprise.

There is, for example, this excerpt from an article appearing in the May 1883 edition of Godey's Lady's Book, a popular women's magazine:

The raw edges of the scraps were usually, though not always, turned under and were held in place by a row of fancy hand sewn embroidery stitches. The scraps could be sewn to the foundation by sewing machine, but in general, this method was not recommended for fear of adding too many straight lines ("angularities offending they") to the finished design. (McMorris 10)

Thus, we learn that these crazy "text-iles" were composed of scraps in a manner that discourages "straight lines" and valorizes randomness. Quilting as craft has been, and continues to be, largely the work of women, a marginalized group with an historically limited range of options for personal expression and story-telling. The recent exception of male "patches" composed for the "AIDS Quilt Project" will be noted below.

So the popularity of this craft coincided with the rise in popularity of other forms of home-based sewing and textile working. However, when demand for textile materials exceeded both supply and the financial ability of families to purchase them, the availability of scrap materials begat the necessity that was mother to invention. Shaped by their increasing economic and artistic value, the proliferation of these scrap materials resulted in the emergence of a collaborative form of text(ile) expression. There began the practice of circulating a "square of embroidery canvas" among friends. "Each friend of which was to embroider whatever design she wished," reported a newspaper account. We are told the paper "playfully" reported: "You will think it a 'crazy' custom indeed" (10).

In her study of Crazy Quilts, Penny McMorris explains that the etymological relationship of the word "crazy" to quilt-making underscored such uses as "odd, bizarre,



irregular, strange, or unusual" and it was even suggested that "their crazy patchwork may have originated among the inmates of insane asylums" (10). The seditious implications of these entries, linking Victorian housewives with asylum inmates, provides yet another historical parallel between the reception of this mad' compositional practice with the response to other visual media and more recent electronically based technologies whose non-linear, wildly collagist aesthetics have been similarly feared and denigrated.

We should also be reminded of the Foucaultian analysis of marginalized and institutionalized groups, such as the insane, whose attempts to express themselves in an alternative discourse from a skewed center of social balance served only to reaffirm their marginalized status and social imprisonment. Similarly, when the victims of slavery in America, a more recent example of socialized constraint and silence, took up the practice of quilt-making, their ability to write between the lines, to mark their text(ile) in the stain of their own blood, became an act of deconstruction, of auto-biography as scarification.

Yet another antecedent to the post-modern moment is the multi-cultural and inter-textual components of the crazy quilt. A major influence was the Victorian interest in orientalism. It is believed that the concept for fabric patches may have been inspired by the broken up, "crazed" pattern, the "cracked-ice" design of Japanese pavement, which became a motif in Japanese art, ceramics and textile design and was then imported into the quilt-making craft. (10-11)

Other cultural influences can be seen in the quilting patterns of ancient Egyptian robes and in the West African practice of weaving patterned strips into a larger fabric, "the resulting cloth [having] asymmetrical and unpredictable designs" (Wahlman 35). The improvisational nature of African quilt-making represents another multi-cultural and inter-

textual link between the craft of quilt-making and the application of theory craft to the Patchwork biography. As Maude Southwell Wahlman points out in Signs and Symbols: African Images in African-American Quilts, "Some African-American quilts are the visual equivalent of blues, jazz, or gospel, rich in color and symbolism" (20). Wahlman traces this improvisational element from its roots in "Kubia raffia cloth and painted Pygmy textiles" and quotes African quilter Eli Leon as saying, "An improvisational pattern is always conceptualized as a range of possible structures" (48).

It is precisely these qualities of the crazy patchwork, derived from diverse sources, that will serve as one of the aesthetic principles for the design of the electronic hyper-text(ile) Patchwork. In addition to the obvious parallels between the methodologies of these two quilt-making endeavors, there is also the historical parallels suggested between the "jazz" elements of the crazy patchwork and Kenneth Patchen's contributions to the invention of jazz-poetry in particular, and to the repeated appearance of improvisation in his use of various media, such as Patchen's theater work with John Cage.

Indeed, it may be demonstrated that the avant-garde movement in modern art, and its specific expression in the Dada movement, was itself pre-figured in the Victorian crazy patchwork period. In a section of her study on quilts entitled, "Everything Gets a Little Crazy," McMorris reports that the popularity of the "crazy effect" and the randomness associated with the patchwork craze resulted in the dissemination of this signifying system to a diverse range of compositional modes from "crazy gardens" to the social practice of "crazy teas". As described in The Ladies' World magazine in 1890, "Crazy quilts, pillows, etc., are going swiftly 'out, but crazy teas are a new and pleasant diversion" (23). The crazy tea was a Dada-like happening from the creation of mis-matched, collagist

invitations, to the Alice-In-Wonderland decor of upside down pictures on the wall, peculiarly shaped furniture placed in random, functionally inappropriate locations, including the serving of a crazy menu of "baked beans covered with currant jelly, cornbread and cheese frosted with chocolate icing, tarts stuffed with chow-chow, and, to quench the resulting thirst, hot, salted lemonade" (23). Even the conversation was Dada-like, a Victorian "jabberwocky" with the "crazy" participants "being stopped and redirected to a new topic every five minutes, at the sound of a bell rung by the hostess" (23).

There appear here numerous qualities we might associate with the emergence of electronic composition and the social practices that have begun to form around such mediums of communication and expression as CD-Rom and the World Wide Web. Indeed, some of these qualities might be likely to upset the likes of Roberts and other writers accustomed to more linear and discursive styles of composing. Like their Victorian precursors, young surfers and scriptors on the Internet seem to share a delight in delivery of information in small "patches" of "bite"-sized information whose brevity and unpredictably juxtaposed order allows both for the elements of surprise and delight.

If the traditional novel, a genre central to the Victorian era, is to today compete with new forms, such as the hypertext fiction now emerging on-line, one might argue that the un-bounding of the square text, and the joy inherent in loosening the constraining threads of such text(iles), was inherent from its inception. And, indeed, the crazy patchwork, like its electronic successor, has been received with considerable anxiety and negative criticism. I had earlier related Robert's lament and his critique of the CD-Rom/hypertext discourse. Some of the initial anti-crazy quilt sentiment was directed at

their lack of order and symmetry. Camps formed around the more traditional use of repeated patterns and symbolic motifs, iterated from panel to panel and those who championed the orientalized aesthetic of the crazy quilt.

But a good deal of the ridicule directed at the crazy quilt "mania," as it was described by some, focused on the unhealthy strain on eyes and nerves and the fear that such a hobby as this might result in some permanent form of either blindness, insanity, or both. In addition, critics labeled the "fancywork" associated with crazy patchwork as a "time waster" and its practitioners were admonished to "fold up your Fancy work" and "come out and have a chat or something that means business . . ." (25). There are clear and interesting parallels here between the public reception and concerns raised by this textual practice and those which have greeted more recent electronic modes of communication such as television and computer related technologies.

### Quilts and Mourning

Not all crazy quilt patterns were as easily susceptible to the charges of triviality and meaninglessness. The creation of the creation of the crazy quilt was sometimes occasioned by the death of a beloved. Such "mourning quilts," as they came to be known, were often "patched" together out of the pieces, the fabrics of a life. A deceased daughter might be represented by patches of fabric from her dresses. In one instance a widow was reported to have taken "her mourning coat, opened it up at the seams, and made a mourning quilt with a central coffin shape to tell the story of her life with her husband" (87). The very choice of the crazy patchwork, as opposed to, say, a more symmetrical or ordered form, was an aesthetic motivated by an emotion. McMorris relates that "The kind

of embroidery, which was at times even and regular, and at other times wildly erratic, came to express the quiltmaker's changing moods" (87).

Dolores A Hinson, writing in the Quilting Manual, points out that "nineteenth-century Americans were obsessed with death" and that the quilt became a means by which to signify the veritably unsignifiable signified that is "death." Hinson remarks,

Cemeteries spanned the chasm between bereaved families and their dead. So too, did the posthumous portraits, photographs and hair ornaments treasured by the survivors. And so did quilts. When families were broken by death, women used these tactile, homey comforters to preserve ties to their deceased loved ones. (11)

Hinson cites the example of Elizabeth Mitchell of Lewis County, Kentucky, whose quilt "portrays the family plot" and whose "appliquéd coffins within it and along the outer borders of the quilt are labeled with family names." Adds Hinson, "Mitchell moved these coffins from the world of the living, represented by the border, into the cemetery [or central portion of the quilt] as her relatives died" (11).

This tradition of the mourning quilt has been monumentally revived in the form of the AIDS Memorial Quilt, described by its founders as "the largest on-going community arts project in the world" (WWW). The inspiration of Cleve Jones in 1987, the AIDS Quilt has expanded beyond 32,000 patches ["panels"], each prepared by individual "panelmakers" to the specific dimension of "3 feet by 6 feet . . . the size of the human grave" (1). The Quilt's Homepage, which arguably serves as a model for, as well as a theoretical de-monstration of, many of the dimensions of the Patchwork project, has taken the collaborative net-working of this formerly text(ile) composition into the realm of electronic patchworking and mystorical hypertext. One speculates that had the World

Wide Web existed at the time of Jones's moment of inventio, the AIDS Quilt would have originated in the virtual form to which it has more recently been transformed.

The instructions provided for the AIDS Quilt Homepage invites consideration of the craft of quilting as a working analog for quiltmaking as a means to do theory. Implicated in this practice is the pervasive influence of the signature effect, the potential play of signification set into motion by the "tens of thousands of people whose names are sewn into the fabric" (1). Panel makers are invited to employ "a little imagination" in the process of their inventio, and to submit their "patches" to the electronic "gallery" of Quilt panels. As a form of mystory, panelmakers are asked to "tell their stories," composed of materials chosen from a wide register of sources: personal history, popular culture, ideology, to name a few.

Even the "how to" section of the AIDS Quilt Homepage instructions parallels elements of Ulmer's notions of theory craft. For example, potential panel makers are informed they "don't have to be an artist or a sewing expert," a point consistent with Ulmer's support for the amateur status of theory crafters. Regarding the structural design of the Quilt, we are told the text(ile) will be "folded and unfolded many times," thus linking Derrida's "invaginating fold," with its metaphorical reference to "catastrophe" seen as a discontinuity or instability in a system.

Ulmer's analysis of Derrida's use of invagination is particularly useful in our understanding of electronic patchworking as a deconstructive enterprise. In observing the "folding back" of the signifier on itself, Ulmer comments that: "Repetition by itself can provide the effects of invagination," a point Derrida demonstrates in "Living On:

Borderlines" regarding a text by Blanchot" (Applied Grammatology 104). Observes Ulmer:

Iterability, the sheer possibility of quotation, of repeating, creates the catastrophic fold in any text, giving it the structure of a Klein bottle (in topology, a single surface "with no inside, outside, or edges . . . recalling the pots with holes knocked in the bottom found in tombs. . . ." (105)

The funereal association of the folded, iterated text, "a deconstruction," posits Ulmer, "of the notion of language as a 'container' for ideas" (105), provides a compelling analogy to the many-folded AIDS Quilt, as it at once a place of mourning "signed" in a series of repeating quotations whose signified, shall we say, "death," no text(ile) can, in fact, contain.

In what may be, perhaps, one of the few deconstructive readings of the AIDS Quilt, Daniel Harris's "Making Kitsch From AIDS" (Harper's, July, 1994), argues 'against the grain' in challenging the claim of the QUILT to re-present it's subject, "death," as anything other than "political knickknack" (55). The AIDS Quilt, according to Harris, has been so "thoroughly sentimentalized" that any signifier associated with the text(ile) becomes an "allegorical emblem of the kitschification of AIDS" (56). Harris provides a counter-reading to the memorial value of the AIDS Quilt Project by suggesting that the adoption of a memorial "patchwork of cloth that can be visited like a grave site or a war memorial" links the text as "a nostalgic folk art" to the "longing for a legendary small town America," thus suppressing, by way of "substitution . . . the iconography of the Christian Church" which has attempted to shape our reception of the signified to which the signifier "AIDS" has been linked.

In a passage which links the potency of the AIDS Quilt as a signifying system to Zizek's concept of the "Ideological Quilt" discussed earlier, Harris attributes to the Quilt

the status of "the sublime expression of AIDS kitsch." Reconceived as Zizek's "ideological quilt," rather than being structured through some unified field, consistent with the ideological status assigned to it by its founders and promoters, Harris's critique demonstrates how others, such as himself, can also "quilt" the floating signifiers through other significations, such as "kitsch," for example, or in semiotic association with corporations whose logos may function as a "point de capiton," a "nodal point"-- as yet another in an endless series of "equivalencies."

One of the objectives of Patchwork, of conducting biographical research in the context of a mystorical hypertext, is to observe the patterns of trajectory which may emerge from fields of association, the nomadic migrations of floating signifiers, set into motion by the Patchwork crazy quilt. Beginning with the heuristically inspired generators of my own mystorical "patches" and continuing outward with the randomly generated "patches" of those who "sign-on" to the Patchwork hypertext, one can speculate that the forces of certain "strange attractors" may form, to use the fractally inspired metaphors of Chaos Theory, potential patterns of order within seeming disorder, certain "readings" on the life and art of Kenneth Patchen that, while unpredictable and uncontrollable by Patchwork's "author," may, nonetheless, fall into certain "nodally" bounded regions along the illimitable signifying chain.

#### Chaos Theory and the "Crazy" Text(ile)

In Chapter Three of her study, Chaos Bound (Cornell University Press, 1990), entitled "The Necessary Gap: Chaos as Self in The Education of Henry Adams," N. Katherine Hayles argues as to how "chaos is as already present within a complex dynamic of revelation and concealment" and, employing a series of textile metaphors, proceeds to



analyze how, for example, "a suture within the text joins Adams's past and present selves" (64-65). Borrowing upon concepts derived from chaos theory, Hayles provides a cogent re-reading of The Education, the implications of which seem applicable to the deconstruction of traditional biographical methodology and, thus, to the development of an alternative biography conceived in the form of a hypertext crazy quilt.

Informed by an authorial 'self' who initially works "from a conception of the universe as unity, linearity, and fixed truths," the text inevitably displays a 'rupture, the 'gap' through which emerges "the world as it actually exists--an anarchistic multiverse of chaos, complexity, and relativism" (62). For Hayles, "The Education seems to be an exemplary account of one man's initiation into the technological and social contexts that form the cultural background for the later emergence of the sciences of complexity" (62). Indeed, The Education may be conceived as a tutor text for the application of crazy quilting as theory craft. The situation faced by Adams in the construction of his autobiographical text replicates in many ways Kenneth Patchen's deconstructive textual practices, practices which return, like the repressed, to haunt the construction of a Patchen biography. Adams, like Patchen and the similarly schizoid 'self' who 'authors' this study, are inevitably hounded by the possibility "that some authorial self lingers beyond the reach of textuality" and that what might constitute the 'meaning' of a life, of a "real self," may "manifest itself within the text as an absence, rupture, or gap," a gesture which, thus, "further complicates the linear flow of the narrative and punctuates the accretion of the inscribed self, rendering its evolution discontinuous or indeterminate" (64-65).

As with Kenneth Patchen, the "subject" of Patchwork, the life and its textual representation are marked by certain discontinuities, and the mystorical quilter of

Patchwork will experience a fate not unlike that of Adams's narrator, one of whose "most characteristic activities is suturing, trying to stitch together a past and a present that have been torn apart and can be fitted together only with difficulty" (70).

As subjects of both biography and autobiography, Patchen and Adams exist as swirling forces of turbulence whose shifting sets of signifying practices respond to the strange attractors, and rendering patterns that when quilted into a narrative fabric, exhibit "a fold that conceals or a tear that reveals" and, suggests Hayles of Adams, "through this gap chaos pours" (73).

#### CHAPTER 4

##### (T)HEORY: LITERARY BIOGRAPHY'S DECONSTRUCTIVE PROCLIVITIES

(T)heory, the third leg of the CATTt, as it relates to literary biography, is a muddy issue, and the record, scattered as it is, suggests that the absence of any unified biographical theory points to its inherent deconstructive tendencies. Noted practitioners such as Leon Edel have observed, "There exists, I am sorry to say, no criticism of biography worthy of the name" (10). Anthony Freidson, in his introduction to New Directions In Biography, comments on a certain "fuzziness in the critical theory of biography" and cites Edel's assertion that biography "has not yet articulated a 'methodology'" and has "'suffered through three centuries from a lack of definition, a laxity of method'" (xxi).

Which is not to say that authors of literary biography have not attempted to define their genre, and to establish certain idealized, if not unattainable goals. The problematics announce themselves in definitions such as that of William Zinnser that make a claim for "the simulation in words, of a man's life, from all that is known about that man" (Zinnser 42). Definitions in a literary tradition of 'life-writing' that dates back to James Boswell's Life of Johnson, reveal an emphasis on verisimilitude, as underscored in Boswell's letter to Bishop Percy, in which Boswell promises to "accompany Johnson in his progress, and, as it were, see each scene as it happened." Yet, as contemporary biographers such as Philip Ziegler have pointed out, "... Boswell's 'Johnson' could never be more than magnificently incomplete, a subjective portrait viewed exclusively from a single point of view" (Ziegler

34). Adds Ziegler, "Boswell's advantages were also crippling disabilities, he did not so much evade the pitfalls that await the contemporary biographer as avoid them or even incorporate them within the landscape of his study" (34). Other critics are more harsh and succinct, suggesting, as does David Gates, for example, that Boswell, "the archetypal literary biographer, was a great gossip and a bum critic" (81).

Somewhere between the famous, ground-breaking work of Boswell, and the impressionistic sketches of Lyton Strachey's Eminent Victorians, to the more reductive, fact-oriented biographies of more recent vintage, lies the illusive goal of the "pure biography." In contrast to Paul Murray Kendall's contradictory claims for biography as "the craft-science-art of the impossible" there is the more self-assured, though no less questionable definition of Sir Harold Nicholson in The Development of English Biography, as summarized by Zinnser, "that 'pure' biography comes into being when the author, eschewing all extraneous purposes, writes the life of a man for its own sake, and though adhering to truth, attempts to compose that life as a work of art" (13).

Zinnser is forced to ask of Nicholson, however, whether "even the 'purest' of biographies is not moved by the commemorative urge? that he harbors, even if unconsciously, no didactic impulse?" (13). To which I would add, How about consciously?

Suffice it to say, the terminology employed by these various attempts to define literary biography raise as many questions as they attempt to resolve. Even when the enterprise is largely focused on the assemblage of facts, the problem of 'truth' telling and verisimilitude are not resolved. For pure epistemological fuzziness, one could do no better

than the following attempt by Zinnser to demystify the bedrock of fact in biographical research:

Fact is cold stone, an inarticulate thing, dumb until something happens to it; and there is no use the biographer waiting for spontaneous combustion or miraculous alchemy. Fact must be rubbed up in the mind, placed in magnetic juxtaposition with other facts, until it begins to glow, to give off that radiance we call meaning. Fact is a biographer's only friend, and worst enemy. (17)

Yes, well beware the biographical subject whose fate lies in this alchemist's hands. Or the reader who must rely on the above mentioned process devoid of its deconstruction by, shall we say, those damnable operations of interrogation posed by critical theory. Indeed, the options, observes David Gates in a 1992 Newsweek review of contemporary biography, are lamentable:

On the supply side we've got an academic world in which criticism has been shanghaied by post-structuralist and p.c. crazies, leaving biography as a vehicle for rational literary discourse. On the demand side, we've got upscale college students, conditioned by culture's obsession with celebrity gossip, who'd rather read about writers than their actual writings. (80)

But Boswell's own proclivity toward gossip (mentioned above) notwithstanding, the fate of literary biography, as will hopefully be suggested in the closing chapters of this study on biography-as-hypertext, may lie in the hands of no single camp of readers, writers or critics. But this is the case to be made in later chapters of this study. What remains illustrative in terms of this chapter's consideration of the current status of theory as it applies to biographical method, may be ascertained in a survey of articles and reviews, many of which appear regularly in periodicals such as the New York Times Book Review, that provide a chorus of voices representing readers, writers and critics of contemporary biography.

It is important to note that the language employed by the non-academic reviews of scholarly literary biographies is replete with references suggestive of the very textual elements which have become the points of inquiry by critical theorists. A reference to Richard B. Sewall's biography of Emily Dickinson quotes the biographer's observation that Dickinson was "a figure upon whose biography no narrative structure could be imposed that is not to a degree arbitrary or fictitious" (Frank 7). In an article entitled, "Faulkner proves too slippery for Karl," Los Angeles Times reviewer, Molly Giles, writes of the "two Bills" which Karl discovered in his research and that "simple duality was a piece of cake for someone as complex as Faulkner" (Giles 9). For Karl, according to this reviewer, Faulkner remains "infinitely, triumphantly, mysterious" ( 9 ).

In a sidebar to a July 19, 1987 review of his biography, Hemingway, author, Kenneth S. Lynn, acknowledges that while he "felt that seven-eighths of him were below the surface," he was able to get to that "invisible" element "by means of biography--by placing his stories within the context of his life" (Lynn 3). The path to this "truth" is to be found, declares Lynn, in "the interplay between fiction and personality" (3). Such a thesis, it might be argued, opens up the possibility for the post-structuralist interplay of textuality, one in which the borders suggested by Lynn's binary oppositions are decidedly blurred, problematized, and in which, in a Lacanian sense, the unconscious (of the subject) is structured like a language.

Occasionally one will come upon claims that bring new meaning to the word "definitive," as applied to the literary biography. Frank Rich's review of William Wright's, Lillian Hellman, suggests that Wright "possesses an essentialist tribute that more passionate writers who neither loved nor reviled his subject do not: he really is an

objective observer" (Rich 1). Wright, according to Rich, "has no hidden agenda," is the real article, the creator of the 'pure' biography. Yet throughout the review we come upon references to Wright's support of "assertions of Hemingway's third wife" and of his "revealing more complexities, however unflattering, than Hellman herself ever exhibited for scrutiny" (38). In addition, we are told that while "Mr. Wright has psychological theories about Hellman . . . the woman who emerges from the book is far too independent a character to fit any neat definition" (39). Our reviewer notes in his conclusion that the final word of Wright's "tantalizingly unfinished woman" is "enigma" and that, "Lillian Hellman, no little fox, continues to out run anyone who might attempt to cage her" (39).

One wonders, then, what constitutes the "objective" status of a biography that accepts (and thus rejects) certain psychological theories, interpretations, data, over others, and which eventually tries to seek cover under the sign of "enigma"? The representation of the endless pursuit of the biographical "subject," of trying to anchor the "floating signifier" represented by the signature of such a subject, linked as it is by a seemingly endless chain of signification in the form of "facts" somehow associated with the subject's appellation, has seen one of its most inventive, and illustrative, pop cultural depictions in Orson Welles's film classic, Citizen Kane.

#### From *Citizen Kane* to *Citizen Patchen*

Welles' film is, curiously enough, based on a screenplay which bears its own weight in authorial speculation in the form of unresolved questions concurring the particular contributions of Welles and his screenwriting partner, Herman Mankiewicz. And then there are, of course, the often noted parallels between Welles's own biography and that of

the newspaper magnate, William Randolph Hearst, upon whom the thinly veiled meta-biography of Kane is established.

From the opening sequence to the last, the film is framed by shots depicting the monumental initial "K" that both invites the viewer/interpreter to pursue a chain of biographical signifiers associated with the name, "Kane," while simultaneously blocking off such access (the "K" adorns the imposing fence that surrounds Kane's "Xanadu"). What one indeed enters here is the memory system of the film, which, like the Lacanian unconscious, is indeed structured like a language.

After a series of voyeuristic lap dissolves, we enter the impossible space (the word is whispered, it registers only at the level of film's memory system) from which is heard Kane's dying word, "Rosebud." The word is uttered in conjunction with the dropping of Kane's fetish object, a Lacanian *objet petite a*, a glass ball paperweight, which, in the memory system of the film, we will later note, contains, metonymically, a snowy winter scene that links, in the film's chain of signification, death-desire-mother-first wife-sled-Rosebud. This list is, of course, incomplete, as the film's final depiction of Kane's mausoleum-like cellar of dead-signifiers suggests. For the semiotic joke upon which the film is so cleverly, if not unconsciously, based is that precisely to follow the bouncing ball, to try and piece together a unified image from the splintered vision initially perceived through the shards of the disseminated fetish object in the death scene and later recalled in the infinite regression of Kane's image as it passes between two mirrors, is to fall prey to logocentrism, to the belief that representation can be policed by language. That both our cinematic, and purportedly real-life, subjects (Kane/Hearst) are in the newspaper business, that they attempt to seek power through control of language, and that they, themselves,



become the subject of investigation by members of their own "truth-seeking" reporters, only adds to the cosmic nature of the joke.

I discuss Kane at length here because, first, the film, I believe, truly speaks to the problematics of biographical representation that concern the Patchwork project, and secondly, because I will be incorporating the film as an element of the mystorical approach to hypertext-biography to be illustrated in Chapter 6, the CATTt's (t)ale. Here, Citizen Kane, functioning as an element of the mystory's "pop cycle," to coin a related Ulmerian term, becomes Citizen Patchen and Robitaille shares the position of the film's investigative reporter, who, like the troubled biographer Robitaille, is confronted by a cubist subject (Kenneth Patchen) about whom swirl conflicting interpretations of both the life and the art.

At one point in the film the reporter is taken to the "Thatcher Memorial Library," a crypt-like Borgesian labyrinth of 'words, words, words, which presumably holds the definitive explanation of Kane's life. Like the magical word that unlocks the divine in the Borges library, so too does the Thatcher collection promise the semiotic link between the signifier, "Rosebud," and the "truth" of he whose utterance haunts our biographical (in)quest.

I use the word "haunt" here purposefully, as the question of haunting, as it relates to language, the (death of) the subject, and literary biography, is a theme that recurs in recent experimental biographies, such as Jacqueline Rose's The Haunting of Sylvia Plath (more about which I will say below), as well as my own forthcoming mystoriobiography, Patchwork.

Of course, the Thatcher Memorial Library provides no good leads for the reporter, and in the film's concluding scene, against the backdrop of the dust-covered hoard of Kane's collective *objet petite d's*, the reporter admits, in response to a query regarding the elusive "Rosebud," that, "Perhaps, a life can't be summarized in a single word." While this may mark the end of the reporter's biographical chase, the memory system of the film continues with the panning eye of the camera as it alights, finally, on a child's sled bearing the name, "Rosebud." While the semiotic joke here might seem to be aimed at the reporter, who didn't quite connect the dots that link, say, "Rosebud"-sled-paperweight-winter scene-childhood-removal from mother, it is really the viewer who is targeted here. It is the viewer/reader/interpreter, teased along by the film's memory system, who is lulled into the false sense of security that seemingly, and conclusively, links "Rosebud" to a given object, whose presence, while promising the missing link to a seemingly endless and incomplete semiotic chain of associations, actually marks an absence, an endless dissemination of free-floating signifiers. Such is the import of the concluding shots of the sled, which, once fed to the furnace fire, becomes just so much smoke, dust, ashes, as the camera exits from whence it came, our final gaze resting on the forbidding gate, the resistant signature, marked by the sign of "K."

#### Other Models for Mysteriobiography

Citizen Kane's exploration of the signature effect, and its deliberate blurring of the distinctions between fact and fiction, whether consciously intended or not, may be seen as the cinematic equivalent of similar demonstrations in postmodern fiction. The relationship of these experiments to biography is clearly and succinctly summarized by Justin Kaplan in his article, "In Pursuit of the Ultimate Fiction," where he writes,

In the most reductive terms, what's a novel but a biography, partial or full-scale, of people who exist first in the writer's imagination and later in the reader's? Both kinds of storytelling may be species of one genus, prose fiction, and the melding or confounding of the two a familiar postmodernist phenomenon: the breaking down of genre, the elevation of puzzle, paradox, mystification and Borgesian sleights of hand. (24)

In his review, Kaplan cites such diverse examples as Norman Mailer's Executioners, Song and E.L. Doctorow's Ragtime, each of which, according to Kaplan, "treat verifiable events as if they were "texts" to be "deconstructed" (24). In words that echo those of Kane's reporter-cum-biographer, Kaplan suggests that: "Even biography's accustomed hunt for a prime mover, a core personality--Walt Whitman calls it 'theMemymself'--may be like chasing Bigfoot" (24).

I am intrigued by the use of metaphorical language that begins to cluster around this notion of the biographical subject, as it is this very play of language which serves, particularly in its homonymic variations, as the foundation for my heuristically inspired hypertext, Patchwork. Gathered in the rather wide net that I cast in search of such examples, were references from Melville's apparitional "white whale" and similarly spectre-like, "Bartleby," to Julian Barne's Flaubert's Parrot. Of the latter, Justin Kaplan observes the following:

Geoffrey Braithwaite, the narrator of Julian Barnes's book, is a doctor and a widower (there are other parallels with Charles Bovary) obsessed with the life of Flaubert, but at the same time profoundly skeptical, even derisive, about the ultimate value of any biography. Like a net, he says, biography can be described as a "collection of holes tied together with a string." (25)

For the purposes of Patchwork, I would like to appropriate the "net" metaphor, and its metaphorical and heuristic relationship to the Inter-net, to a problematizing biographical text conceived as a series of electronic "patches" or hypertext "links," each of

which is tied together by a "string" woven by the various reader/browser/quilters, no given resulting pattern of which may ever be said to be (w)holecloth.

In my readings for this chapter I come upon a related metaphor, a reference to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of a "field" in Didier Eribon's "Preface" to his biography of Michel Foucault. Eribon appropriates Bourdieu's concept to describe an "intersection" of "theoretical, institutional, and political space[s]" that constitute his "intellectual project" (xii). I note that Eribon concludes the paragraph by noting that his text is also composed of "several cultural registers," one of which, a reference to the Ecole Normale Supérieure on the Rue d'Ulm, curiously, provides a homophonic link to "Ulmer," whose own writings on mystory in Teletheory link to a drawing provided by Jacques Derrida for the design of a "folie" in the Parc de la Villette that is based on a metaphor informing a passage in Plato's Timaeus. This metaphor is that of "the chora as crible, sieve or sift" (240). This sieve, whose function Derrida characterizes as an "interpretive and selective filter which will have permitted a reading and sifting of the three sites and the three embeddings," may be seen, in its electronic sense, to parallel the functions of the "grid" provided by the intersection of recombinatory patchworkings of my hypertext biography (241). For Ulmer, Derrida's "sieve," or "mesh," I prefer the latter term for its allusion to the text(ile), leads mystorically to "a description of the gravel plant [where Ulmer's father worked], which is a three-layered grid for sizing rock" (241). For Robitaille, the rhizomatic flow of associations links Ulmer, via Derrida, to (Patch)en via Robitaille. But the flow of associations does not end here. As it turns out, Robitaille's and Ulmer's textual maps intersect precisely at the "rue d'Ulm," in my case, via the reading of Eribon's Preface, cited above, and for Ulmer, via "a copy of Feu la cendre from Derrida with "the return address

on the stationery--'45 Rue d'Ulm'" (241). And it is by way of this redoubling of the mystorical crossroads that Ulmer's reading of Derrida's text brings our present discussion of biography's deconstructive tendencies back around to my reading of Citizen Kane's closing sequence, the sled in the furnace, to the place and function of memory in the film, as well as the function of memory that haunts the biographical quest.

Ulmer is struck by the significance of Derrida's text, in which he says, "I now have the impression that the best paradigm of the trace is not, as some have believed, the track of a hunt, a marking, a step, and so on, but ashes, that which remains without remaining of the holocaust, of the burn-all." To which Ulmer responds,

Not senders and receivers, then in a theory of communication, but cinders. In an idiom referring to the "late," the deceased. A writing without debt that is as good as a burning. No monument, no Phoenix. The "late" is also the "fire" in the idiom, the fire that cannot be effaced in the cinders as a trace. It is a word that is in question, that is to be put in place of memory, in the place of memory, to which we are to listen; to take the word into the mouth and ears. Fire. Choler. But it could be any word, any black on white letters. Not icons, but indexes, in this writing. A text will not resemble what it is about, but be caused by it, the way smoke relates to fire. (241)

And, we might add, the way a life relates to its anti-biography, to a mystory written in the key of its infinitely disseminating progenitor. It could be any word. "Rosebud." "Patchen." I am drawn to Ulmer's thesis, and his ongoing interest in what he has identified here, and in his review of Eric L. Santner's Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany, as "the problematic of mourning" (153). As will be obvious in my mystorical (t)ale or electronic patchwork hypertext to follow (Chapter 6), my own relationship to Kenneth Patchen, revolves, in no small part, around various mystorical associations having to do with certain shared traumatic experiences of loss and the resulting problematics of incomplete mourning.

As we will note, Patchen's pre-war loss of his sister, Kathleen, becomes the haunting lens through which he views the horrors of World War Two. The textual interplay of these events in his fiction, poetry, drawings and social interactions, reveals the continuity of what Ulmer refers to as a "discourse of mourning" present in Patchen's early correspondence, a discourse that reveals the author's prescient awareness that his entry into a life of language held no promise of escape from melancholy, mourning, a radical sense of a Lacanian "lack."

In his review, Ulmer identifies a problem central both to "institutions of letters" and "the contaminated legacy of [Paul] de Man himself," precisely "how to break out of the defensive circle of binary logic (identification or condemnation) in order to integrate his [de Man's] work within a usable past" (154). Such is the dilemma which surfaces in the handling of the Patchen archive. One can, like Henry Miller, in his essay on Patchen, "Man of Anger, Man of Light," acknowledge the subject's schizoid potentialities, rather than fall prey, as did most of Patchen's acquaintances, reviewers, scholars, et al., to the more reductive claims of angry negativist or romantic angel. Aware of the tendency of critics, publishers and readers to claim for him an association with a specific political and/or artistic camp, Patchen virtually assured his departure down the black hole of literary anonymity by refusing to be 'formulated' and 'pinned, to borrow the Prufrockian metaphor, to any given segment of the signifying chain. Few readers of the Patchen signifying system recognize in the material of his biographical corpus, what Ulmer locates in the writings of Habermas: "the need for a postconventional identity that could accept fragmentation of life (of history as a 'pile of wreckage'), and renounce the desire for rootedness that produced fascism" (154).

What Ulmer finds significant in Sander's discussion of "two elegiac project[s]"-- Edgar Reits's television series, Heimat, and Our Hitler, a film by Hans Jurgen Syberberg-- are the tendencies of each "to repeat the operations of blocked mourning that they set out to overcome" (154). It is precisely this repetition, this biographical conundrum, which Patchwork attempts to avoid. And it is through the nomadic, rhizomatic operations of the mystorical hypertext electronic patchwork, that the "desire for rootedness," endemic in the traditional literary biography, will be both addressed and short-circuited. My objective in pursuing this alternative biographical route is precisely that which Ulmer suggests Reitz and Syberberg are unable to achieve in their work: "to rescue the 'stranded objects' from the wreckage of history" (154). It is my belief that while Patchen may have been tragically unaware of the nature or unique accomplishments of his valiant attempt to escape the destructive forces of a logocentric, Western patriarchal culture, his legacy of deconstructive art, as will be experientially re-presented in Patchwork, allows for the possibility, quoting Ulmer's appraisal of Walter Benjamin's "theory for a more effective mourning," of "a past that did not in fact take place but that remains available as a possibility, as alternative choices, acts that might have been, as the basis for a renewed legacy" (154).

#### Figures Before the Wall

I pause for a moment to re-imagine, to re-image, this question of effective mourning, in the form of a figure sitting before a wall. Indeed, what appears is a series of such figures receding in infinite regression, like that of Kane caught in an instance between two mirrors: splintered, schizoid selves. These figures, however, are each seated before a blank wall. Patchen comes to mind first, in the several accounts of the artist as a young

man placing his chair before a blank wall, staring away from the assembled gathering. A youthful gesture of stylish defiance, perhaps? A bodily preconfiguration of his later, life-long back ailments: the perils of exposing his backside (and in this anti-biographer's case, his *taille/tale*)? Similarly confronted with the exhausting demands and spiritual limitations of logocentrism, Melville signs with "Bartleby," a tale told from a tomb, the writer reduced to scrivener, copier, who, after a prior life among "dead letters," "prefers not to" improve upon the perfection of a blank wall.

Or are these figures the embodiment of one who is attempting, in Ulmer's words, a "passage through the wall" (the walls of the crypt, or of a fort) by finding a medium that interrupts the confrontation, is part of the choral linguistics needed to write directly with the Symbolic code" (Heuretics 233)? Hence, Patchen's reach beyond logos, to a writing in multimedia, with color and pigment, with jazz syncopation, with the body itself. Central to this choral linguistics, as Ulmer demonstrates in his own mystery, "Derrida at Little Big Horn," is the function of the choral word, which "operates at the micro level of language, the way writing with the paradigm operates at the level of discourse, and provides the inventio that gathers differences into a set" (223). Or, as suggested earlier in relation to Plato's *Timaeus*, the chora as a "sieve" or "grid," that leads, argues Ulmer, not to "verification," but rather, to "the choral zone between fate and freedom, an irreducible zone of luck, chance, risk, and timing . . . the region of invention" (240).

Seen in this light, Kane's "Rosebud," or Patchen's "Kathleen," are not the anchors of meaning that verify, and thus, totalize in a fascistic manner, the subjects associated with these utterances. Rather, employed heuristically, as choral words, they explore a space beyond mourning, a space that is generative, not funeral. In such a space the misnomer of



biography as a "life-writing" becomes not the traditional entombment of its subject, but a writing born out of a life that truly liberates its subject. In such a biography, what is "authorized" is not an official "reading" under the signature of a singular scholarly authority, but rather, the authority, always already inherent in the effect of the signature, to enter into a mystorical interplay between signatures. In short, to enter the electronic choral space, to join the electronic quilting bee, the Patchwork.

Before turning in Chapter 5, (T)arget, to a more detailed discussion of biography-as-electronic-mystory, and of the specific elements that will be included in the closing chapter, the CATT(t)'s (t)ale of crazy, woven "patches" in my electronic quilt, I would like to consider a few more examples of texts that have acknowledged the deconstructive tendencies inherent in biographical theory and methodology, and which serve, thus, as tutor texts in the designing of an alternative biographical practice.

#### More Alternative Approaches

Two particular examples, which anticipate the visual dimension that a multi-media hypertext such as Patchwork can provide, involve "auto-biographies," each experimentally revisiting the meaning of that genre by invoking the image of a photograph as an initial problematizing element of the text. The first of these models, My Room: The Autobiography of Louise Brogan, is referred to on the cover as a "Mosaic by Ruth Limmer." In addition to the visual component, Limmer's introduction describes her choice of the mosaic aesthetic as the means by which to bring together a patchwork, if you will, "composed of journals, notebook entries, poems . . . sentences and paragraphs from her [Brogan's] criticism, portions of letters, a lecture, answers to questions . . . short stories, recorded conversations, scraps of paper" (xx). The list reads like the collaged contents of

a CD-Rom without, of course, the added features of multi-media and hypertexted links. Limmer's "Introduction" is motivated by a "disconcerting photograph of Louise Brogan, which, when "viewed from a distance" and then "close up," becomes, in Limmer's eyes "formidable" due to the "multiple readings it projects" (xiv). It is not, of course, an image she can, or does, re-present to her readers.

In bringing together these materials, Limmer hopes to construct the auto-biography Brogan never wrote, while admitting neither is it the auto-biography she would have written. She likens the readers' experience to that of entering a gallery of "self-portraits" whose "effect should be no more unsettling than an artist's retrospective" (xxi). I cite the example of Zimmer's mosaic and those to follow below precisely because the inclusion of the visual element here, and in a multi-media hypertext such as Patchwork, becomes a crucial register of undecidability that both problematizes and enriches, in a Barthesian sense, the play of signification associated with the image-as-signifier.

Among the examples cited by Anthony M. Friedson in his "Foreword" to New Directions in Biography, is that of Michael Ondaatje, whose experimental, collagist texts, such as The Auto-biography of Billy-The-Kid, 'loosens' the "barriers of form: genre, modes, and tones," (xix) that have come to define traditional modes of 'life-writing. Like Limmer's "mosaic," Ondaatje's Billy-The-Kid combines a diverse range of materials: poems, fictionalized docu-dramatized news accounts of the day, imagined interviews, and the like. And, in a strikingly similar gesture, Ondaatje opens with a reference to a photograph, in this case represented on the page by a blank white space framed in a black border. In the "caption" beneath the blank space, the ironic prose commentary calls attention to the un-representability of the Kid's image. "I send you a picture of Billy," the

caption begins, addressing an undecidable reader, "made with the Perry shutter as quick as it can be worked. . . ." (5). Obviously not quick enough to capture this image. In lines that link this caption to that of the inscrutable Kane, Ondaatje's "reporter" speaks of photographic experiments in which he tries to capture the essence of "bits of snow in the air" and, with a pun on the "truth" factor of his subject, promises to "send you proofs sometime" (5). One is reminded of a certain phenomenon of the absence of presence which Umberto Eco soberingly associated with the signified, "death," for which, observed Eco, there is no sufficient "signifier." It is Hamlet's "Where's Yorrick" moment from which Tom Stoppard's character, The Player, so aptly extrapolates that death is best signified when "someone fails to show up." It is the moment in Citizen Kane, following the "erasure" of the sled (floating signifier) beneath the falling snow on the occasion of the young Kane's removal from his mother (a moment of loss, trauma, a "little death"). This moment is followed later by the flickering blank white screen after the last of the real/reel documentary images of Kane's life are projected before the reporter/detective/viewers' eyes. It is Melville's white whale, Bartleby's blank wall, the Wittgenstein realization of the limitations of the reach of human expression. It is, finally, what moves Sven Biktors to dread in Biography and the Dissolving Self: A Note, where the acknowledgment of contemporary engagement with the biographical subject as an image of media identification results in a condition where "lives seem to be losing mass and dissolving into ever more nebulous bunches of pixels" (AGNI, No 40). Since my mystorical engagement with the Patchen corpus involves the intersection of our lives via the electronic, I am intrigued by Biktors' fears. Indeed, one of the as yet unresolved questions in my

experiment is precisely the fate of both the biographical subject and the reader/electronic sriptor of Patchwork. What is potentially lost in this space? And what is gained?

One provocative response to these questions may be found in another iteration of the "imaginary" quality of the image as presented in the opening passage of Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes. In his experimental autobiography, Barthes explains that the photographs included in this 'life-writing' leave him "in a state of disturbing familiarity," and that in each case, "I see the fissure in the subject (the very thing about which he can say nothing)" (4). Later, in Camera Lucida, Barthes would write, "Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not that we see" (6).

What we do see, suggests Barthes, and what links Barthes's speculations both to the other example provided here, as well as to my own mystorical relationship to the Patchen corpus (I use the cadaverous metaphor purposefully), is the "Spectrum of the Photograph" (9). Barthes's use of the term "spectrum," he explains, relates it "through its root . . . to spectacle" and "adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead" (9).

What Barthes has to say later in this chapter about the "portrait-photograph [as] a close-field of forces" is, I would argue, applicable to the full range of signifiers that come into play in biographical writing, particularly a multi-media biography such as that proposed in Patchwork. Thus I quote the passage at length:

Four image-repertoires intersect here, oppose and distort each other. In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art. In other words, a strange action: I do not stop imitating myself, and because of this, each time I am (or let myself be) photographed, I invariably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity, sometimes of imposture (comparable to certain nightmares). In terms of image-repertoire, The Photograph (the one I intend)

represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis) : I am truly becoming a specter. The photographer knows this very well, and himself fears (if only for commercial reasons) this death in which his gesture will embalm me. (Barthes, Camera Lucida 13-14)

From Boswell's pre-photographic promise "to show" Johnson as an image captured verbally in situ, to the contemporary biographical subject photographically represented in Benjamin's 'age of mechanical reproduction, the "air of a face," in Barthes's poetic estimation, "is unacknowledged," and the "certainty" which its presence is intended to assure, results merely in the "arrest of interpretation" (107).

#### Passage Through The Wall

How then does the biographer escape the fate of thus embalming his subject, of inducing what we might call this condition of the cardiac arrest of interpretation? Or, in the case of the electronic computer-based biography, the micro-chip version of death, to recoin a Barthesian phrase? How, to state the matter, as does Ulmer, in another way, to "short-circuit the melancholy of guilt linking the Hermeneutic code to the superego" (Heuretics, 232). To work through this impasse Ulmer turns to choreography via Barthes and the "antithetical organization of the Symbolic code" (232). Ulmer cites the following passage from Barthes to "describe the situation of this code," a situation, I would argue, that similarly describes a template for an electronic crazy quilt:

The two terms of an antithesis are each marked: their difference does not arise out of a complementary, dialectical movement: the Antithesis is the battle between two plentitudes set ritually face to face like two fully armed warriors: the Antithesis is the figure of the given opposition, eternal, eternally recurrent: the figure of the inexplicable. Every joining of two antithetical terms, every mixture, every conciliation--in short, every passage through the wall of the Antithesis--thus constitutes a transgression: to be sure, rhetoric can reinvent a figure designed to name the transgressive; this figure exists: it is the paradoxism. (Barthes, 1974:27)

The "passage through the wall," which Barthes associates with Antithesis and which Ulmer likens to "the walls of the crypt, or of the fort" (Ulmer, Heuretics 233), requires "finding a medium that interrupts the confrontation," a medium Ulmer invents incorporating a "choral linguistics" that allows him "to write directly with the Symbolic code"--precisely the heuretic device he employs in his mystory.

The promise of a choral writing in a hypertextual mystory is the promise, to use Julia Kristeva's analysis of Barthes's work, of "the awakening of subjects" (Kristeva 121). "This awakening," argues Kristeva, "occurs simultaneously with the putting into play of the desire for a signifier to symbolize a 'real' that has fallen into the subject's past or is questionable for society" (121). Kenneth Patchen, in this study, is such a subject.

In the early stages of my conceptualizing this project, one of my goals was to find a rhetoric and a medium that would allow the reader/viewer/navigator of this hypertextually quilted patchwork biography to experience the same sense of vertigo that I had experienced while negotiating the labyrinthine pathways and multiple perspectives that emerged from the biographical and textual materials that composed the Patchen archive. It is Barthes who again provides a model for such a re-imagining of biography writ chorally and "by means of a violent anacoluthon" (Barthes, New Critical Essays 49).

In his analysis of Chateaubriand's Life of Rance, Barthes explains that while Chateaubriand "meant to be no more than [Rance's] pious biographer," the biographer is 'initiated, by way of "anamesis" and a "passion of memory" that results in an "interlacing" in which "Chateaubriand must remember for two; whence the intermingling, not of sentiments (Chateaubriand actually feels little sympathy for Rance), but of memories" (45). Operating, thus by "superimposition" as opposed to "projection," Chateaubriand "can do

more here than enter by force, fragmentarily, a life which is not his own" (45). The vertigo resulting from this forced and fragmentary entrance is elaborated upon by Barthes in terms that I believe set the stage for Ulmer's development of the mystory and for its potential incorporation into an alternative biographical practice. Describing a series of parallels in the lives of Chateaubriand and Rance, Barthes observes that "the Reformer's [Rance's] thread is broken for the sake of the narrator's sudden reminiscence" (45). Note the textile metaphor here linking Chateaubriand's textual practice to the electronic gaps and unpredictable "patches" or webbings inherent in a Patchwork crazy quilt. Adds Barthes,

In this broken recurrence, which is the contrary of assimilation, and consequently, according to current meaning, of a "creation," there is something unsatisfied, a strange sort of undertow: the self is unforgettable: without ever absorbing him, Rance periodically reveals Chateaubriand: never has an author undone himself less; in this Life there is something hard, made up of splinters, of fragments combined but not melted down; Chateaubriand does not double Rance, he interrupts him, thereby prefiguring a literature of the fragment, according to which the inexorably separated consciousness (that of the author, that of the character) no longer hypocritically borrow the same composite voice. With Chateaubriand, the author begins his solitude: the author is not his character: a distance is established, which Chateaubriand assumes, without resigning himself to it, whence those reversals which give the Life of Rance its special vertigo. (46)

Other similarities exist between Barthes's analysis of Chateaubriand's textual practice and Ulmer's heuretics, as, for example, their shared reliance on the homonym and other similar plays of language for the purpose of invention. In describing how in ordinary discourse "the relation of words is subject to a certain probability," Barthes notes that such "ordinary probability is rarefied by Chateaubriand" through the use of "cultivated gaps" through which a "surprising substance . . . erupts into the discourse" (47). Indeed, the marvelously performative and generative qualities of Ulmer's own mystories, such as that presented in his "Derrida at Little Big Horn" or the "Beau Geste" of Heuretics, provide

similar "surprises" that emerge out of the "cultivated gaps" and rarefied probabilities at work therein.

I find truly haunting, one of the closing passages of Barthes's essay on Chateaubriand, a paragraph in which vertigo achieves the status of a troubling dream--a dream in which both the subject of literary biography and he or she who reads said subject, is implicated in the "theater of . . . language" and "where the soul is doomed to speech" (53). Such marks the intersection of the forking paths of Patchen/Robitaille/Welles/Kane and all other parties who join the quilting bee and co-sign the patchwork by virtue of their hypertextual weaving and unweaving of the infinite strands that both compose and decompose the endless combinatorial arrangements of the Patchwork inter-active, mystorical biography. Again, to quote Patchen himself, "You are not reading this book, this book is reading you" (Moonlight 202 ). Barthes writes,

Every man who writes (and, therefore, who reads, has in him a Rance and a Chateaubriand; Rance tells him that his self cannot endure the theater of any language, or he is lost: to say I is inevitably to open a curtain, not so much to expose (which henceforth matters very little) as to inaugurate the ceremonial of the imaginary; Chateaubriand, for his part, tells him that the sufferings, the discomforts, the exaltations of this self, in short, the pure sentiment of his existence, can only plunge into language, that the "sensitive" soul is doomed to speech, and consequently to the very theater of that speech. For nearly two centuries this contradiction has haunted our writers: consequently we find ourselves dreaming of a pure writer who does not write. (53)

Such, I believe, was Patchen's dream and his consequent flight into the obsessive dissemination of his signature across of variety of media until all that was left beyond the tortured register of his jazz poems and the primitive, alien forms of his painted poems, was the final anchoring of the self's free-floating signifier in the universal language of the scream, which, according to his wife, Miriam, signaled the moment of his passing.



I close this chapter's commentary with some reflections on two more 'hauntings,' two more recent attempts to construct an alternative biographical practice sensitive to the problematics of biographical representation and which anticipate strategies to be employed in Patchwork. The first, Jacqueline Rose's The Haunting of Sylvia Plath (1991), begins with the disclaimer that the text to follow "is not a biography," that the author "is never claiming to speak about the life, never attempting to establish the facts about the lived existence of Sylvia Plath" (xi). Indeed, Rose asserts she has no desire "to arbitrate between competing and often incompatible versions of what took place" (xi). What does propel Rose's engagement with her "subject" is "the circulation of fantasy in her [Plath's] texts" and certain "difficult ethical issues -- about the legitimate scope of interpretation" (xii). Calling into question the notion that there is "only one version of reality," Rose sets forth, not to certify an authoritative reading of the life and art, but rather, to explore why, and in what sense, it can be said that: "Sylvia Plath haunts our culture" (1).

For rather than providing her readers a unified subject, "Sylvia Plath," as an easily anchored signifier, "her presence," observes Rose, "seems to open up a rent or gap in the world" (2). In language that evokes the reporter's dilemma in Citizen Kane and the plight of the biographer central to this project, Rose notes,

Often, as we will see, it is technically impossible to separate Plath's voice from those who speak for her. . . . Plath's writings and the surrounding voices stand in effigy for her, they speak in her name. It is this effigy that haunts the culture. This is of course true of any writer who is no longer living--in fact of any writer, whether living or not. (2)

It is the acknowledgment of this phenomenon that prompts the emergence of an alternative approach to the biographical subject, an approach, such as that explored in Ulmer's *mystory*, that neither ignores this contamination effect, nor sees it as a limit point

for the generation of a creative exchange with the play of signification "authorized" by the constellation of signifiers that move in and out of the orbit of her signature. Indeed, Rose posits a Derridean recognition of the complicity of language itself, of the centrality of difference and of the double space of writing, when she writes,

What she [Plath] presents us with therefore is not only the difference of writing from the person who produces it, but also the division internal to language, the difference of writing from itself. It is the more striking that so many critics have felt it incumbent upon themselves to produce a unified version of Plath as writer and woman, as if that particular form of fragmentation or indirect representation were something which, through the completion of their own analysis of her, they could somehow repair. (6)

This compulsion to "repair" the subject, a compulsion readily apparent in the comments of Patchen's friends and foes alike, is an occupational hazard amongst literary biographers. The tendency to formulate the subject according to rules of bifurcation, Patchen as angel of darkness and light, nihilist or romantic visionary, peacemaker or aggressive antinomian, results, according to Rose's insightful theorizing, from the failure to recognize that:

There is no history outside its subjective realization, its being-for-the-subject, just as there is no subjectivity uncoloured by the history to which it belongs. The division between history and subjectivity, between external and internal reality, between the trials of the world and the trials of the mind, is a false one. The distribution of opposites which has relentlessly attached itself to Plath is the consequence of a false premise, a false antagonism, from the start. (8)

In search of a paradigm, of an aesthetic, that will serve as model for a 'life writing' that will avoid such fascist agendas, Rose takes her cue from Plath's use of the collage form, constructed as a "set of fragments" and which, significantly, "is also not unlike a picture puzzle or rebus, which is the model Freud offered for the language of dreams" (9). While rejecting the reductive interpretation of this collage form as valorizing a

"disordered, fragmented, shifting subjectivity which women oppose to a destructively linear world," Rose argues, I believe, for an electronic logic, when she credits Plath's collage as a means to work "across boundaries, psychic, political, cultural . . ." (10). It is this multidimensionality, inherent in the mystorical approach to an alternative biographical practice, that Rose hopes to honor in her non-biography.

Yet another recent experiment inspired by the 'hauntings' of its "subject" is Louis Kaplan's Lazlo Maholy-Nagy: Biographical Writings. Kaplan's text, like those discussed above, similarly anticipates the possibilities inherent in a hypertextual, non-linear, patchworked, mystorical alternative biography. Kaplan's project takes its cue from Maholy-Nagy's artistic precept of "vision in motion" which Kaplan associates with relativity theory, and which employs certain "deformation strategies and multiple distortions" that ultimately "provide a powerful critique of any mode of representation" (3). Kaplan identifies in Maholy-Nagy's artistic practice "a set of operations and strategies that acknowledge the problematics of language for the visual arts and [which] consider art as a signifying practice," a point central to the understanding of the role of Patchen's art to Patchwork. Indeed, I would submit that such is not only the case with Patchen's multimedia explorations and textual practices, but that one can conclude of Patchen, as Kaplan does of Maholy-Nagy, that:

... this linguistic turn provides another source and resource of turbulence and resistance to an unproblematic form of historical representation, and this, in turn, impacts any biographical attempt to seize upon Maholy and render an account of his life (3).

Indeed, Kaplan succinctly summarizes the premise for the current project when he notes that "abstract art art and theories of language in the twentieth century have

problematized the representation of the (biological) object of study and the claim to an immediate, direct, and easy accessing of the referent" (3). Having accepted this phenomenon as a (T)arget towards which he must invent an alternative strategy of approach, Kaplan's inventio, his "particular thrust" at this semiotically untethered subject, "is to review how the artistic practice of Laszlo Moholy-Nagy engages a primal scene of signification in the staging of signature effects, and further, to consider how this signature practice impacts upon the writing of biography" (4). Kaplan cites as an example Derrida's Glas, in which the "double band of the signature's writing" serves generatively to produce a writerly text out of the juxtaposition of the signatures (and their respective play of signification) of Hegel and Genet.

In Patchwork, this Derridean practice of decomposing the proper name into the common noun, is extended through its employment as a strategic element in Ulmer's heuristically inspired mystory. As Kaplan points out in his study of Maholy-Nagy, this extension of the signature event into the realm of biography also finds its prototype in Derrida, as witnessed in his "Otobiographies" wherein Derrida "challenges the genre of philosophical biography that is constructed upon the historicist maintenance of a rigid separation of the life and work of the philosopher" (9). Kaplan's project proceeds therefore by way of the "substitution of the term (Moholyean) "artist" for (Nietzschean) "philosopher," setting the stage for a writing "in the Key of Moholy" (10). The key to this Derridean maneuver, as exemplified, say, in his The Ear of the Other, is when Derrida "problematizes the fixed biographical subject by lending an (other) ear to the line of textual credit undersigned in the posthumous name of Friedrich Nietzsche on account of the dynamics of the eternal return" (10). Similarly, as will be discussed at length in

Chapter 5, "(T)arget," it will be observed that what emerges from biography as hypertextual mystory, is the electronically aided and abetted "patching" of the "other" in an endless cycle of eternal returns to a "subject" whose co-signature extends the range of its signification beyond the bounds of the traditionally "authorized biography." As will be illustrated in Chapter 6, in which the CATTt exposes it (t)ale/taillle, the resulting patchwork mystorical biography transcends the usual exhumation of the literary "corpus" for purposes that ensure the author is "dead" in a manner infinitely more stupefying than that of the poststructuralist "death of the author." In the case of Patchwork, the chasing of one's (t)ale/taillle becomes the occasion for the biographical subject and those who engage in the event of his signature, not simply to "be" told, as in the case of the static model of the "authoritative" wholecloth framing of the life, but rather "to bee," as in quilting bee, where the participant crazy quilter may explore "the architecture of the between," the interstices between biographical subject and other, the various and deconstructive patterns whose electronic, graphical representations form an Heraclitean stream, which "gives the graphic," according to Kaplan, "back to biography" and visually re-presents "the drift of the signature effect" (188).

#### Assessing Patchworking Elements for Electronic Mystoriobiography

As the template below reveals, this study has included a diverse range of concepts, represented by their respective signatories, that strongly support the hypertextual approach proposed by the Patchwork mystoriobiography. In essence, if the traditional biography was characterized by verisimilitude, a singularly authoritative analysis of a purportedly unified subject, and an hermeneutic emphasis on defining the 'true' aspects of a life, the alternative approach exemplified in Patchwork may be said to be informed by a

heuretical, multivocal, collagist and generative interplay between the archival materials and the co-signatories creatively writing in the keys of the floating biographical signifiers. The following table includes a 'sampler' of some of the major elements included in the construction of Patchwork.

Table 1. Sample of Major Elements in the Construction of Patchwork

Concept	Co-Signatory	Tutor Texts	Heuretical Application
Post-structuralism/ Deconstruction	Derrida Barthes	<u>Glas</u> <u>S/Z</u>	grammatology - double space of writing
Signature effect	Derrida Barthes Ulmer  Kaplan	<u>Signsponge</u> <u>Roland Barthes</u> <u>Derrida at Little Big</u> <u>Horn</u> <u>Maholy-Nagy</u>	Writing in the key of Patchen/Robitaille
puncept/homonymy	Derrida Ulmer Kaplan	<u>Signsponge</u> <u>Beau Geste</u> <u>Maholy-Nagy</u>	Patchen/ <u>Patchwork</u> Robitaille/ tailor of electronic text(iles)
octobiography	Derrida	<u>The Ear of the Other</u>	the function of the 'other' in octobiography
mystory	Ulmer Ross McElwee Wittgenstein	<u>Teletheory</u> <u>Sherman's March</u> <u>The Brown Book</u>	mystoriobiography
hobby theory	Ulmer		electronic quilt-making
rhizome/nomadic writing	Deleuze & Guatarri	<u>Anti-Oedipus</u> <u>A Thousand Plateaus</u>	rhizomatic qualities of electronic writing
Midrash	rabbinical scholarship Susan Handleman	<u>Talmud</u> <u>The Slavers of Moses</u>	computer-generated electronic midrashing in the form of cyber- patchworking
popcycle	Ulmer	<u>Heuretics</u> <u>Beau Geste remake</u>	incorporation of <u>Citizen</u> <u>Kane</u> as entertainment, popular culture element in <u>Citizen Patchen</u>
hypertext	Landow	<u>Hypertext</u>	mystoriobiography as hypertext

Concept	Co-Signatory	Tutor Texts	Heuretical Application
randomness/chance	Cage	various applications of <u>I-Ching</u> to performance artworks	recombinatorial possibilities and chance reconfigurations of quilt patches in <u>Patchwork</u>
chaos theory/strange attractors	Hayles Adams	<u>Chaos Bound</u> <u>The Education of Henry Adams</u>	chaos theory as a design element for an alternative biographical practice
heuretics/CATTt	Ulmer	<u>Heuretics</u>	design template for conceptualizing <u>Patchwork</u>
crazy quilt	long tradition dating back to the Orient  McMorris	many examples of crazy quilt patterns  <i>Crazy Quilts</i>	hobby craft to be integrated as hobby theory
ideological 'quilt'/ points de capiton	Zizek	<u>The Sublime Object of Ideology</u>	<u>Patchwork</u> as ideological quilt
alternative historiography	Foucault  White	<u>The Order of Things</u>  <u>Metahistory</u>	analysis of relationship between power and knowledge  historical narratives and tropes employed to make sense of history
dialogism/polyphony/carnival	Bakhtin	<u>The Dialogic Imagination</u>	introduction of polyphony and the analogic into mystoribiography
memory/mnemonics	Carruthers	<u>The Book of Memory</u>	mnemonic organization scheme as heuretic device in <u>Patchwork</u>
alternative forms of academic discourse	Ulmer Ray	<u>Heuretics</u> <u>The Avant- Garde Meets Andy Hardy</u>	avant-garde as alternative mode of research
ideological apparatus	Althusser	<u>Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus</u>	examination of the subject becomes constituted in ideology

Thus, in Chapter 5, we take aim at our (T)arget and with electronic needles in hand we join the Patchwork quilting bee. In doing so, we will examine the mystoriobiographical elements of a Patchwork hypertext and consider the plurality of readings which the recombinatorial possibilities of these "patches" might potentially yield.



## CHAPTER 5 (T)ARGET

A precious, last of its species bird was placed into a Ming quality vase. The bird has grown to such a proportion that it can no longer be removed from the narrow mouth of the vase without damage to either the bird or the vase. How do we resolve this dilemma and protect both the bird and the vase?

Answer: Poof! It's out!

--Zen Koan

To approach knowledge from the role of not knowing what it is, from the side of the one who is learning, not from that of the one who already knows, is to do mystory.

--Gregory Ulmer, Mystory

### Introduction

If the fate of hermeneutics in general, and literary biography in particular, is putting so many precious puzzles and conundrums in bottles, only to release them in the name of a given "truth" or explanatory theme, thus diminishing the complexity of the subject while embellishing the vita of the scholar, then I suppose I will have none of it. What I had originally mistaken as a desire to explain Kenneth Patchen both to myself and the world, I soon discovered had less to do with resolving the complexities of this cubist subject and a whole lot more to do with what thinking about the materials of this rich archive could tell me about the, at times, almost fetishistic relationship that so often results in the warring emotions of fascination and repulsion recounted by so many practitioners of the trade.

As discussed earlier, there are many interesting accounts by professional literary biographers, such as the "haunting" experience cited in Jacqueline Rose's encounter with

Sylvia Plath, which attempt to analyze this phenomenon from the perspective of the expert in the field. Having begun my own journey fresh out of graduate school, I feared my status as a beginner would expose me as an amateur, and as such, I would do the subject of my study an injustice. It then occurred to me that it was precisely the professional critics and biographers against whom Kenneth Patchen had railed, fearing, justifiably, that their formulations would entomb him in the very shrouds of dead language that his increasingly diverse artworks were attempting to transcend. It was as if the very cues for a Patchen anti-biography were embedded in the gaps, fissures and meta-moments of his work. I now find confirmation and consolation in Ulmer's claims for mystory as the legitimate enterprise for amateurs such as myself. I began all of this on the side of not knowing, and what I am going to say in my mystory, while it may shed some light on the Patchen corpus, is likely to be a small ray of illumination in a crypt of contorted contours and a constantly shifting karst-like topography. The site of the present writing, Gainesville, Florida, is best described as an "irregular limestone region" and not well suited for those who prefer to build on bedrock. To write in such a space is to learn something about how one comes to enter such a space, what it is like to get lost there. Here you might catch an occasional glance of the literary corpus and other artifacts left behind by other strange attractors like myself, caught in the vector of signifying forces bounding the seemingly chaotic field that biographers reductively refer to as a "life."

For indeed, if what Patchen's *Albion Moonlight* says is true of his Journal, that it has no "end," then it may be similarly said of my curious mystoriobiography of Patchen, that it has no beginning. The Heraclitean stream of floating signifiers into which I immerse

myself is an onion with no center, which is not to say that it is not without an operating paradigm or propelled forward by emotions of unknown origin.

It seems that at some originally subconscious level, later to surface consciously via the medium of mystory, I was drawn to Patchen's corpus in the primitive, visceral fashion of a carrion crow seeking fresh kill, the literary biographer as ambulance chaser, seeking confirmation of my own mortality in the obsessive meditation on Yorrick's skull. Not mistaking the container for the contained, tugged along by a certain absence of presence, I knew that wherever this journey led me, and it is now some thirty years since my lover placed that first haunting Patchen signature at my bedside, that what I would discover on this journey would have less to do with the truth or falsity of the biographical details of a life, and a whole lot more to do with the capacity of language to convey human expression even as it taunts us with its constant reminder of its fundamental inability to speak the unspeakable, to penetrate beyond the final punctuation mark which signals a profound lack, the absolute silence of the grave.

One might say, then, that in this instance the biographical "urge" was motivated by a certain "bliss-sense," which, as Ulmer explains, "manifests itself in mystory as aleatory associations formed by three levels of discourse: private, popular and expert" (*Teletheory*, 96). In the case of Patchwork, let us review what these three levels contain and how, ultimately, they form "the nexus of history, politics, language, thought and technology" which mystoriobiography, writ electronically as the braided elements of a hypertext patchwork quilt, is capable of generating.

One of the organizing principles of a mystory is the employment of the punctum as a mnemonic, like that which is generated by the punctum arriving in the form of a "sting"

which "is an emotional response to certain details 'expressed' in an image, calling to mind an experience of time" (110).

In my family album, the scraps of which I will electronically patch together as a hobby theory in my Patchwork hyperquilt, there exists the following images which I will categorize according to the manner in which they will link up to the other two levels of discourse in the mystory (popular and expert), thus forming the template for the construction of the quilt.

### Crash Sites

Imagine, if you will, a quilt patch bearing the iconic rendering of a crash site (e.g., police tape embossed over the chalk outline of a crash victim). Click here and you enter a gallery of crash site images which represent in my mystory the nexus of a series of catastrophes spanning the discourse levels of personal, popular and expert. From the register of the personal we have the following.

#### Personal Crash Sites

My paternal grandfather died in a car crash when my father was six years old. He was a carpenter and building contractor in my birthplace of New Bedford, Massachusetts, who died before he was able to build a home for his family. At precisely the same point in time, Kenneth Patchen's father was pursuing the same trade in his birthplace of Warren, Ohio. According to accounts I have received from high school classmates, the Patchens lived in a series of "shells" constructed by the father and then sold, and Patchen spent his youth in a series of such partially constructed sites. It was while living in such a "shell" that Patchen, received word that his beloved sister, Kathleen, had been killed in an auto accident. Correspondence with Patchen's friends and family suggests he responded to this

event with extreme displays of grief and such a response is corroborated by his thinly veiled short story, "Come Bury Them in God." Beyond incidental surface similarities of their housing situation, there remains the more obvious symbolism of an early loss of a significant other due to a family catastrophe.

I have only recently begun to piece together, as a result of mystorical patchworking, the significance of the impact of my grandfather's death on my father. Though as a child, I had certain premonitions that my father's desire to be an active presence in his family's life was in large part motivated by having not had this paternal presence himself. I also suspect that this "lack" imposed upon my father's personal ideology a certain conservative set of constraints that militated against risk taking and an almost compulsive embrace of the status quo. Growing up I heard my father's endless recitation of the homily: "I wept because I had no shoes, until I met a man who had no feet." Years later, in my older adolescence, I would chide my dad in fits of righteous indignation, for constantly referring to someone else's greater misfortune as the basis for accepting his own seemingly unexplored challenges and personal opportunities. In the mystorical imagination that shapes this telling, my father was Melville's "snug" and "safe" narrator and was destined to play his *Bartleby*. I mention this anecdote because at some subconscious level the repercussions of the crash site continue to reverberate outward, ultimately predisposing me, no doubt, to a disestablishmentarianism I have identified in the works and signifying materials associated with the Patchen signature.

This crash site, and the others to be (s)cited below, form an artificial memory which Ulmer relates to a "personal cemetery," in a manner similar to earth artist's, Robert Smithson's, reference to "a kind of tomb" (180). "The signature," writes Ulmer, "is related

to Lacan's account of the Name-of-the-Father as founding metaphor of language, invented to mark the tomb of the Dead Father" (180).

Though my father had few memories of his dad to recount to me, he did recall proudly that a plaque bearing his father's name could still be found outside a church my grandfather constructed in New Bedford. Curiously, the other local site that continued to hold my father's attention in later years, and that he had made the object of an almost sacred pilgrimage one summer vacation following our move to Miami, Florida, was the Seaman's Bethel featured in the opening sequence of Herman Melville's Moby Dick. The nexus of these two sites and their relationship to language, the tomb of the Dead Father, and the mystoribiography, Patchwork, are precisely this: My father left a dying industrial mill town because its two major industries, fishing and textiles, were threatened and on the verge of extinction. My father's accounts of the harsh working conditions and depressing lifestyles I would later find echoed throughout Patchen's literary works and personal correspondence. In coming across Henry Miller's reference to Patchen's birthplace as looking like "the planet Vulcan," I tactilely recalled the piles of coal in the abandoned mill yards of New Bedford. When my father moved the family to Florida when I was three, following a brief stint working for the railroads, he began working as an engraver of plaques and name signs.

The historical and personal ironies here are many and will later be seen to span all three levels of discourse: private, popular and expert/disciplinary. My father's link to his own dad was memorialized in a plaque on a church, a site representing an institution, the Catholic Church, which both Patchen and I would later associate with the tomb of another absent signified, the metaphysical divine. My father became an engraver of such plaques

and signatures. Like Patchen, my father, having abandoned the graveyard of dead text(ile)s, (cite/site here Melville's solipsistic trajectory from Moby Dick through "Bartleby" to the lonely linguistic interiors of Pierre), took up copying other's signatures. My father also shared Patchen's interest in type-fonts and both seemed to be drawn to the graphic elements of their work, even as both seemed to personally lament the deadly repetition of "signing" for others. Lawrence Ferlinghetti informed me in a personal interview conducted on January 2, 1980, that the first issues of his City Lights Publishing Company were printed using font styles he found in a text given to him by Kenneth Patchen. For both Patchen and my father, in others words, signing became associated with an act of commodification. For my father, it was a means of earning a living, and even for Patchen, the practice of embellishing limited edition runs of his work with colophon numbers and a hand-written signature, was intended to increase market value while ostensibly offering the purchaser a "limited edition" in which no two signatures were alike. But, of course, it was the very recognition of Patchen's 'trademark' childlike signature, its reproducibility, upon which Patchen's very limited income as an artist came more and more to rely. Indeed, Miriam Patchen speaks with some remorse about having agreed to have Patchen's work be published by Hallmark, and in one of the last items I came across in publisher James Laughlin's Patchen correspondence at New Directions, there is a reference to interest at Apple Records to produce a project in conjunction with Patchen. If one examines John Lennon's, A Spaniard In The Works, the parallels between the nonsense tales and the fetal, Paul Klee-like images, and Patchen's work is striking, not to mention their shared anti-war sensibility.

Thus, the trajectory of Patchen's signature moves from the decision by Random House founder and publisher, Bennett Cerf, to publish Kenneth Patchen's Before the Brave (1933), under red cover, as their first proletarian poet, through Hallmark's appropriation of Patchen's romantic verse, to the unrealized potential to co-sign a text with a former Beatle. Throughout this entire process of the signature's dissemination, what goes largely unrecognized in the process are the complex deconstructive elements of the work that both explain its history of appropriations and exploitations, as well as its insistent contrariness, its resistance to play monophonically in a single register of meaning (socialist, humanist, romantic, beat), thus ultimately fating the corpus to the dustbins of marginally anthologized literary history.

It is here, in the contemplation of these 'dead letters' that I follow the mystorical path back to New Bedford and the Seaman's Bethel, where my father traced with my tiny fingers the supposed signature which Herman Melville allegedly carved into the pew. (Many years later I strain to recall the actuality of this scene, to question whether it is not the fiction of the voice who recalls for me what "seems" to be the past). Of course, what is important here mystorically is the linkage of Melville's "Bartleby," a scrivener whose previous experience working in the "dead letter office" of the postal service, manifests itself throughout the text in the repeated refrain, "I prefer not to," and in his ultimate dissolution from starvation in "the tombs."

My father, thus, spent most of his life as a scrivener of sorts, having left one form of dead text(iles) for another. Was my father's haunting memory of his father's signature on the church plaque, and his later life in signage, a variation on the theme of incomplete mourning? A mourning in which the living is fated to repeatedly co-sign with the hand of



the deceased? Does my own compulsion to explore the Patchen palimpsest, to follow the forked path of Patchen's peregrinating signature, signal, perhaps, my own attempts to escape the stranglehold of my own logocentric genealogy? How ironic, is it not, that for thirty years my father worked for a man named "Law" at a firm called "Law's Engraving"? Surely I could not have invented a more logo-centric affiliation, where the "law" of language was the work of the engraver of dead letters.

Finally, I should add that the one element of bliss-sense my father experienced in his work with signatures was the oftentimes homonymic quality of their coinage, which often inspired in him a fond appreciation for homonymic play and the pun. At the dinner table nothing would please my father more than the groans he could elicit from a truly bad pun. My appreciation for this form of linguistic play, of course, now informs my mystorical retelling of this *taille/tale*.

#### Popular Crash Cites/Scene One: Death, Television and Catastrophe

My earliest memory of the phenomenon of death coincides with one of my earliest memories of television. In the early days of the Today Show, 1950 or so, host Dave Garroway would appear in live skits that took place outside the studio on the streets of New York City in a manner later to be emulated by David Letterman and others. Garroway and company sought to exploit the new territory of the televisual "real" by blurring the distinction between the "real" and the "newsreel" that had previously been manipulated in the cinema and, thus, made available for deconstruction in scenes like that in Citizen Kane, in which the facts of William Randolph Hearst's life are framed with a pseudo-documentary profile of Charles Foster Kane, framed in-turn within the fictional narrative of Welles's classic.

The Today Show sequence that functions as a punctum in my mystory involved Dave Garroway being flattened by a runaway steam roller. Utilizing a series of dramatic shifts of point-of-view, the experience of Garroway's terror is witnessed both in the expression of panic on his face and from his perspective as the steam roller approaches. After viewing shots of the impending fatal encounter from behind the barricaded street side audience, Jack Lescoulie, Garroway's sidekick, peels a cardboard thin facsimile of Garroway from the pavement. As an obviously hyper-sensitive child, the sight/site of this accident sent me into paroxysms of uncontrollable crying, followed by what my parents must have felt was an unhealthy period of grief and their seemingly ineffective attempts at consolation. A couple of years ago I came across, quite by chance, a tiny obituary in the paper mentioning the passing of Jack Lescoulie and the obscure bit of television trivia that Garroway had named him "The Saver" for having pulled the duo out of so many near gaffs in those early days of live, wild west television broadcasting.

The question for mystory is how the stings of such memories, recurring as strong images from the past, live on in the present as one of the organizing principles of one's subconscious thought. In the case of Patchwork, the visual and audio patches of the hypertext quilt would graft the cry of the distraught child with that of both the oblique and disturbing shriek of the cockatoo in Citizen Kane and the scream which Miriam Patchen reported hearing at the moment of her husband's passing. All the many words uttered and written by or about the signatories Patchen, Robitaille, Kane, will not, under the pressurized forces of hermeneutics, yield a truth of gem-like precision that reveals that which is signified by these vocalizations. This observation is marvelously dramatized in the semiotic joke with which Edgar Allan Poe concludes his short story, "The Case of M.

Vladimir." Having mesmerized a dying patient, a physician hopes to hear the man's personal account of what he experiences as he crosses the threshold from life to death. The patient complies by speaking the unutterable utterance, "I am dead." The rest, to quote Hamlet, is "silence." Critics have also noted in Citizen Kane that Kane's deathbed utterance, "Rosebud," could not have been passed on to the reporter since the scene suggests the whispered comment would have been inaudible to any other character in the film. As I noted earlier, it is precisely in the artificial memory of the film itself, and the interplay of disseminating signifiers set in motion by this utterance, that the term seems to yield its generative powers.

The Today Show incident precipitated a later series of car related dreams of catastrophe in which I would find myself in an automobile perched precariously close to the edge of a dark water body. In each repetition of the dream the emergency brakes on the car would slip and the vehicle would slip into the brink. As the water poured into the car a toy quite popular at the time would float into view. It was a black, fortune telling ball with a window screen into which would randomly float a series of cryptic predictions. In my dream what appeared was the date of the accident. However, before my night consciousness could retrieve it, I would wake, sweating and disturbed, in my darkened bedroom. In Patchwork, specifically in the mystorical detournment Citizen Patchen, the fortune-telling ball is substituted for Kane's paperweight, while serving similarly in the memory system of my "tale" as one in a series of floating signifiers, of points de capiton, available for sewing or patching together various interlocking narratives.

Even more curious, as fate would have it, is the appearance of a February 4, 1998, news story in the San Francisco Chronicle that El Nino rains brought torrential floods to

Palo Alto, and that Miriam Patchen, wife of the late poet, Kenneth Patchen, found their home suddenly inundated with rising water. Mrs. Patchen was rescued by someone in an outboard boat and left behind in her wake were many lost, rare, personal items including original works by the author. Indeed, the corpus is never safe, and there always exists the danger that all traces of the signature may be obliterated. Truly a biographer's nightmare!

The writing of the Patchwork mystery, thus, is not so much to "save" Patchen from his entombment within the crypt of a more traditional biographical and historical analysis, but rather, to quilt out of the patchwork of crazy scraps left behind in the wake (pun intended) of his passing signature. In other words, to be a quilt maker, one must be a "saver," a collagist with a desire to produce not a mourning coat out of the wholecloth of hermeneutic truth, but a crazy quilt whose generative interplay of seemingly unrelated scraps allows for the constant schiz-flow to circulate.

#### Popular Crash Sites/Scene Two: From the Automobile to the Nuclear

The crash site as a popular manifestation of a collective obsession may be explained in part by psychological theorizing such as Freud's, but there is little denying the documentable tendency in popular culture and tabloid journalism for the "If it bleeds, it leads" mentality that drives the sales of print and visual media today.

I was born precisely at the onset of tv nation. The first television broadcast in Miami, Florida, took place within weeks of my birth in July of 1949. It was in Miami that the family diet of television was quickly established and it now occurs to me that crash sites have been a regular item on this menu of tv fare: the fatal intersection that marks the site of the Kennedy assassination, the vapor trails of the Challenger explosion, the

potential for catastrophe signified by a speeding white Bronco and, most recently, Princess Diana's fatal exit into the dark tunnel of death-by-media.

The site of catastrophe that links the private and popular levels of discourse in Patchwork is the scene, not only of the automobile accident (the real/reel exposure of technology run amok), but, similarly, it is also the site of the nuclear blast, the possibility of total annihilation of human consciousness. This punctum, and its sting of memory, like the auto accident and its televisual re-presentation, is also closely linked to Robert Smithson's view, as noted in Ulmer's Teletheory, of the "coalescence of the ages of video and the H-Bomb" (183). Ulmer quotes Smithson on this point, and the passage marks such a significant element of Patchwork, and of my relationship to the signifying materials associated with the Patchen signature, that I cite it in full:

It seems that "the war babies," those born after 1937-38 were "Born Dead"-to use a motto favored by the Hells' Angels. The philosophism of "reality" ended some time after the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the oven cooled down. Cinematic "appearance" took over completely sometime in the late 50's. "Nature" falls into an infinite series of movie "stills"—we get what Marshall McLuhan calls "The Reel World." (Smithson, 74)

As I include visits to specific sites of individual and mass extermination in my tour of memory, a tour that will be emblemized in the patches of my electronic quilt, I execute "a process of mourning" in which the "places turn out to be arranged around a monument bearing the signature, if not the family name, related to death and decay" (184). In Patchwork, this monument will appear in the initial screen as a remake of Kane's "Xanadu," and the merging of our family names, Kane/Patchen/Robitaille, signaled by their respective initials on the front gate, which, as they alternate in appearance, can be clicked

upon with the mouse, marking the first of many forking paths presented in the mystoriobiography's detournment of Citizen Kane.

Such a "non-site" is seen to be hinged rhizomatically with the site of individual experience and institutional discipline . . . figured . . . as a family album" (184). In this case, the album takes the form of a film-remake through Xanadu, upon whose virtual walls may be found a series of crazy quilts, each of which is embedded with patches hypertextually linked to the rhizomatically expanding and recombinant text(iles) of the mystoriobiography.

Thus, to return to the coalescence of the H-Bomb and video, I should note the following specific stings of memory. Not long after I moved to Miami from New Bedford, there began the practice of low level aerial spraying of pesticides to control the spread of disease due to mosquito infestations. Already hypersensitized by images of aerial bombardment witnessed in the countless hours my father watched such popular war series as Victory At Sea, the sight/site of these low flying prop planes just a few feet above tree line, had me running for the shelter of the utility room behind my home.

Then, in the early 60s, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, we learned that the South Florida pharmaceutical tycoon whose estate backed onto our property was building the largest bomb shelter in the state just a few yards from my own tiny shelter in the utility room. My brother and I would sometimes leap the stone wall behind our home and make our way through the avocado grove to stare at the bunker which rose like an Indian mound out of the ground. Meanwhile, at school, my classmates and I watched Civil Defense films and participated in frequent air raid drills where we were instructed to

huddle, fetal-like, under our desks where, as the popular college poster of the day darkly joked, we could "kiss our sweet asses goodbye."

However, the sting with the greatest half-life relating to my nuclear memory was, in fact, related to its video re-presentation, a "Playhouse 90" adaptation of Pat Frank's apocalyptic 1959 novel, Alas, Babylon. Much to the horror of my admittedly hyper-sensitive adolescent imagination, Frank's vision of nuclear Armageddon is set in Fort Repose (the name has a crypt-ically funeral ring), an apocryphal river town in Central Florida. When the bombs begin to fall, we witness a mushroom cloud to the northeast and electronic communication with Jacksonville is instantly cut off. On the evening of the premiere broadcast of Alas, Babylon, I was watching the program at home in Miami, knowing that my close cousins were then living in Jacksonville. Like Jersey Kosinski's Chauncy Gardner in Being There and Orson Welles's radio audience for War of the Worlds, I found it difficult to separate the real from the reel, and so my parents finally resorted to a long distance phone call to confirm my cousin's survival.

It is only now, as I revisit these stings of memory, that I finally pick up a copy of Frank's novel. I am immediately struck by this paragraph in the author's foreword to the book:

A man who has been shaken by a two-ton blockbuster has a frame of reference. He can equate the impact of an H-bomb with his own experience, even though the H-bomb blast is a million times more powerful than the shock he endured. To someone who has never felt a bomb, bomb is only a word. An H-bomb's fireball is something you see on television. It is not something that incinerates you to a cinder in the thousandth part of a second. For the H-bomb is beyond the imagination of all but a few Americans, while the British, Germans, and Japanese can comprehend it, if vaguely. And only the Japanese have personal understanding of atomic heat and radiation. (7)

While I do not question the impact that being "shaken" by an H-bomb would have on an individual, a deconstruction of this paragraph yields, I believe, several points that both call into question the logic here, while revealing a number of points central to Patchwork. Indeed, it is by way of Ulmer's consideration of "nuclear criticism" that I read against the grain of Frank's language.

In Teletheory, Ulmer provides a series of tutor texts which manifest what he refers to as elements of "nuclear criticism." Central to this criticism is the "deconstruction of the apocalyptic tone" and the realization "that nuclear catastrophe is the one referent of the literary, in that it is the one event that cannot be internalized by the symbolic" (201). The following passage from Derrida encompasses the spirit and genesis of Patchwork to such a degree that I repeat it here in full:

An individual death, a destruction affecting only a part of society, of tradition, or culture may always give rise to displacement, and so on. In that case there is a monumentalization, archivization and work on the remainder. Similarly, my own death as an individual, so to speak, can always be anticipated phantasmatically, symbolically too, as a negativity at work—a dialectic of the work, of signature, name, heritage, image, grief: all the resources of memory and tradition can mute the reality of death, whose anticipation then is still woven out of fictionality, symbolicity, or, if you prefer, literature; and this is so even if I live not to equate with the annihilation of humanity as a whole; this catastrophe occurs with every individual death; there is no common measure adequate to persuade me that personal mourning is less serious than a nuclear war. But the burden of every death can be assumed symbolically by a culture and a social memory (that is even their essential function and justification). Culture and memory limit the "reality" of individual death to this extent, they soften or deaden it in the realm of the "symbolic." The only referent that is absolutely real is thus of the scope or dimension of an absolute nuclear catastrophe that would irreversibly destroy the entire archive and all symbolic capacity, would destroy the "movement of survival," what I call "survance," at the very heart of life. (Derrida, 1984b: 28)

As Derrida suggests, every death is a catastrophe sufficient to yield a half-life of slow emotional decay. But what can now be said of the post-Hiroshima age is the



capacity, presently in place, "to destroy the entire archive and all symbolic capacity." The implications for teletheory are clear in that "nuclear catastrophe represents that which resists internalization and therefore escapes mourning" (202). Ulmer follows with a critical observation that calls into question the logic of Frank's position, when he states: "It is not a question of actual annihilation, but of this image that makes accessible to thought the other of mourning" (202).

When Frank dismissively suggests that "to someone who has never felt a bomb, bomb is only a word," he fails to appreciate that it is precisely in the incapacity of this word to signify "that which resists internalization" that the transduction between language and image takes place. Given what cannot adequately be expressed in alphabetic language, one is thus compelled to explore the way of deconstruction, of that which is "more than a language and no more a language" (202).

I believe this is exactly what the young Patchen was puzzling over in the letter to his high school friend cited earlier in which he expressed his distrust and futility with alphabetic language on the cusp of his decision to declare himself a writer. Anais Nin, writing of Patchen's prose in her diary, finds only "a confusion of languages, gutter jargon, literary, colloquial, inflated to achieve rhetorical grandeur, a Tower of Babel creating only chaos" (Nin 64). Seen, however, from the perspective of nuclear criticism, Patchen's 'Babel' becomes the source of his venture into painting and jazz-poetry as a means by which to expand the range of expression in order to possibly articulate that which a logocentrically-bound writing practice could not. Given Patchen's restlessness with form, his efforts to destabilize every genre and media he worked in, and his resistance to formulation by any given ideology or aesthetic (e.g., "proletarian," "beat"), it would not

only be ironic, it would be a missed opportunity not to explore in the Patchen archive the materials with which to invent texts composed in the "key of Patchen," that is to say, composed in the same schizoid spirit of delimitation and permutation which characterizes the inherently open ended enterprise associated with his signature.

#### Expert Crash Sites: Deadly Disciplinary Intersections

It is when we cross the personal and popular levels of discourse and their respective catastrophic crash sites, with the deadly wreck-strewn intersections of deconstructed disciplinary discoveries, that the full implications of the Patchwork paradigm come into play. As has been argued throughout, the importation of hypertext, heuristics and mystory into the practice of an anti or post-biography, is intended, to quote Hal Foster on the post-modern sensibility, "to grasp the present nexus of culture and politics and to affirm a practice resistant both to academic modernism and political reaction" (xv). In this section, I would like to illustrate precisely how "writing in the key of Patchen" becomes the generative means by which to explore the limit points which traditional biographical practice would impose on our understanding of biography in general, and a Patchen biography in particular. Indeed, as the record will show, each of the elements of the Patchen archive (the author's creative work, his correspondence, critical and academic analysis, and the writings of those who knew him) anticipate the onset of a poststructuralist, deconstructive perspective which now makes available for discussion and reconsideration those aspects of the archive which vexed, and in other ways limited, the range of readings 'authorized' by the sign of "Patchen."

This sentiment is well-represented in Raymond Nelson's observations of Patchen's Panels on the Walls of Heaven, about which he notes, "That system of shared and shifting

identities can be difficult because it results in literary practices with objectives and standards different from those of the traditionally oriented literature for which we have a critical vocabulary" (63). Or there is this entry on Patchen's Journal of Albion Moonlight in Anais Nin's infamous diary: "Chaos is born out of great fissures which happen in the telling of the story. There are pauses. Silences. Mysteries. Fissures" (65). Echoing Nin's puzzlement is this comment by Charles Glicksberg on Patchen's textual practice: "Obviously, even in composing these works, Patchen must have had some architectonic principle in mind. Why then, does he labor so frantically to keep it concealed and disguised?" (Glicksberg 191).

And yet, even as he searches for the explanatory perspective and language which would later be provided by poststructuralism and deconstruction, Glicksberg does provide critical commentary that links Patchen's enterprise to the postmodern. He notes, for example, that, "When Freud found the death wish implemented in human beings, the poet discovers in the civilization of his time. [Patchen's] The Dark Kingdom, for example, is the poetic, imaginative expression of Freud's essay 'Thoughts on War and Death' published during the height of the First World War" (186). Here we see identified Patchen's exploration of the 'double space of writing' that is characteristic of the heuritic, generative quality of poststructuralist textual practice. Glicksberg further expands on the function of invention in Patchen's work when he suggests:

If Patchen has learned from his literary predecessors, it is chiefly from Joyce (in his playing with words and puns, his parodies of conventional plots and his grandiloquent style), from Kafka (in his use of enigmatic symbols and a tortured, mystically ambiguous 'plot'), and most of all from Freud, though he can use these references with remarkable freedom and independence. (186)

Indeed, it is analysis such as this, with its attention to a generative approach to his material (a poetic rewriting of Freud) and textual play (e.g. use of puns) that gets closer to the "truth" of the Patchen oeuvre than the many critiques of the period, which reduced the play of signification to either a straight-jacketed singularity ("Marxist," "Beat") or a deranged schizophrenia. However, what many found in, say, The Journal of Albion Moonlight, to be an anarchistic and destructive gesture, others, such as Raymond Nelson, perceived as the liberating embrace of a textual practice more generative than destructive—a practice, one might add, that seems to anticipate the collagist, grammatalogical space of electronic, multi-media. Nelson observes:

By the time we have reached the end of The Journal, Albion and his technique have succeeded in creating a real literary mess. The last pages of the book are strewn with the rubble of exploded forms; journal entries, the table of contents of one novel and fragments of several more, snatches of poems, an assortment of catalogs, marginal musing. The closing words are:

There is no way to end this book.  
No way to begin

But in disorder, Albion has freed himself from ordered insanity, transcended the usual human condition, and experienced truth. (Nelson, 1969, 235).

The "truth" as Nelson explores it in Kenneth Patchen and American Mysticism is to be found in the realm of a non-western logic, such as that exemplified by the Zen riddle or koan, and which eschews the rational categorizations and bifurcating, either/or propositions which characterizes the hermeneutical thrust of traditional literary biography. Such a "truth" has more to do with a 'living on' of the corpus, rather than exhumation and dissection. When we arrive at this site, at this precise moment of collision, the personal, popular and expert come together in the form of catastrophe whose outcome has implications at all three registers of discourse. From a post-Foucautian perspective, it is not enough to question the status of the "contained" subject. Rather, we must consider the

very institutions and their practices charged with defining the rules of subjectification. Foucault's indictment of the prison, may be, in the case of Patchen, extended to the 'prison house of language' whose structures of confinement he sought throughout to escape in his explosive forms, even as the analytical armies sought to snare him in their hermeneutical traps.

The centrality of nuclear criticism as a means by which to better appreciate what survives the impact of this collision between the personal, popular and expert levels of discourse is well-represented in the collaboration of Patchen and avant garde musician John Cage on the radio broadcast premiere of Patchen's play, The City Wears a Slouch Hat. According to Richard Morgan, "the play was performed only once, for the Columbia Radio Workshop (WBBM-CBS) on Sunday in New York, May 31, 1942," and that "sound was done by John Cage" (Morgan 9). There appears to be no extant recording of the broadcast. While the published version of the script reveals little indication of the avant garde experimentation that would later bring Cage international prominence as a postmodern musician, the intersection of these two lives is a major contributing factor to the Patchwork mystory and to the design aesthetic shaping its construction.

I refer here specifically to Cage's practice of employing music as, notes Ulmer, "a kind of research" in the manner in which Patchen's rewrites an essay by Freud in the form of an experimental prose poem. In this way Cage (and I would argue, Patchen) "postmodernizes the critical essay by bringing to bear in its inventio and dispositio the same collage and aleatory procedures used in writing with tape recorders and other electronic equipment in his musical composition" (102). It would be a safe bet to suggest that had Patchen and Cage linked up later in their careers, and had Patchen lived on into

the age of electronic, computer-based multi-media composition, their respective experimentation into collagist forms would have been all the more richly embedded in postmodernist elements. I believe we can imagine that their work would have exhibited vibrantly transformed chance driven iterations of Patchen's already exploded forms. One potential feature of Patchwork is to include in its design the capacity to envision and, indeed, create new Patch-workings (here again electronic pun on "patch" intended) based on the 'key of Patchen, thus remotivating the archival material in the mystorical quilt.

But the grafting of Patchen to Cage yields more than a shared avant garde aesthetic. As Ulmer points out in his essay, "The Object of Post-Criticism," Cage's contribution to nuclear criticism, vis-à-vis his "passion for mushrooms," may "be read as paraliterature, the mushroom may be understood as a model mounted in a discourse for allegorical purposes" (104). Ulmer links Cage's mushrooms to Derrida's "pharmakon" and, by extension, to the existence of certain "undecidables" which according to Derrida are "unities of a simulacrum that can no longer be included with philosophy's (binary) apparatus" (Positions, 43).

Ulmer sees in Cage's "fascination with mycology" the artist's aesthetic insistence on the "undecidability of classification" (105). Such "undecidables introduce a certain "risk in reading" associated with Barthes's S/Z. He cites Barthes's observation that: "One defect in this encyclopedia, one hole in the cultural fabric, and death can result" (105). Thus, Ulmer concludes, "The mushroom, in other words, demonstrates a lesson about survival" (105). The implication for Patchwork is precisely not to conceive of the quilt as a "whole" but rather as "patches" in a crazy quilt pattern whose seams, tears, fissures and "holes" are both manifest and intended. Such is the nature of the cultural pattern in which both our

subject, "Patchen" and his reader/biographers must encounter this perpetually floating signifier.

The danger of the sort of "death" to which Barthes refers is marked, if you will, by the site/sight of the collision of these three intersecting discourses and their respective catastrophes. And it is this tripartite collision that both haunts and shapes Patchwork. For the mushroom, in its role as saprophyte is, "an organism that lives on dead organic matter" and, explains Ulmer, "exist in symbiotic, mutually beneficial relationship with their hosts" (105). In the present case, mystoribiographers-as-saprophytes enjoy just such a symbiotic relationship with their material, and rather than exhuming Patchen's corpus only to dissect it, a work of post-biography such as Patchwork, thrives by "growing among the roots of literature, feeding on the decay of tradition" (106). The mushroom cloud is here reconsidered in terms of the half-life of decay, rather than as an annihilating force.

When we enter the re-motivated, hyper-linked space of "Xanadu" detoured as Citizen Patchen, that which was the ruins of the conflated Hearst/Kane/Welles Museum becomes ruins in the sense implied by Adorno and Benjamin, for whom "the museums were signs of the decay of the bourgeoisie era, requiring in philosophy a 'logic of disintegration'"(106). Such a logic, as I have suggested above, was always already written into Patchen's work and thus instigated much of the critical commentary surrounding his oeuvre.

What has remained largely undiscovered and unappreciated is the extent to which Patchen's "logic of disintegration" was the means by which to escape the trap of logocentrism and to ensure that the never-quite-famous Patchen signature, rather than validating an ideological identity, in which the signified came before the signifier, would, in

his case, see the reverse of this sequence. In Patchen's case, as will be explored mystorically in Patchwork, we are all the potential addressee of this signature and interactively implicated in the dissemination of that which is signified in his name.

Henry Miller, perhaps Patchen's most famous admirer and supporter, understood in a profound way the peculiar qualities of Patchen's art, which would have been characterized as "antiliterature" in the parlance of the post World War I world, but which may be seen today as exhibiting a postmodern, poststructuralist sensibility and aesthetic. Nelson aligns Patchen's disposition with other "twentieth century mystical writers" and cites the following statement in Henry Miller's "Reflections on Writing" in which we find language rife with the with the metaphor of the nuclear:

I have always welcomed the dissolving influences [in art]. In an age marked by dissolution, liquidation seems to be a virtue, nay a moral imperative. Not only have I never felt the least desire to conserve, bolster up or buttress anything, but I might say that I have always looked upon decay as being just as wonderful and rich an expression of life as growth. (Nelson 67)

In Miller's praise of "decay" as a literary virtue, what is unaccounted for is the fact that decay is inextricably linked with the growth process, and gives rise in creative terms to inventio. As an example of what can emerge out of the ruins of decay, Douglas Crimp, in his essay "On The Museum's Ruins," attempts to deconstruct "the museum's claims to represent art coherently" (44). Of particular significance to my project is Crimp's referencing of "Robert Rauschenberg's transformation of the picture surface into what [critic Leo] Steinberg calls a 'flatbed, referring significantly, to the printing press" (44). Crimp underscores the fact that "the flatbed is a surface which can receive a vast and heterogeneous array of cultural images and artifacts that had not been compatible with the pictorial field of either premodern or modernist painting" (44). By extension, according to



Crimp, Steinberg's critique of Rauschenberg's textual process points to a significant "transformation in the epistemological field"--a transformation with considerable implications for art history and the museums designed to represent and institutionalize this history. (45)

In Citizen Kane, the protagonist-as-media-mogul, and his attempt to control destiny through a fetishistic manipulation of his printing presses, is yet another of the film's reminders of the "flatbed" capacity to bring a vast array of signifiers together in a manner that ultimately confers to the paper's indeterminable addressees the power to determine the play of signification and possible "meaning" therein. In the case of the detournment, Citizen Patchen, the role of the printing press or "flatbed" is transformed into the electronic surface of the computer screen, and the recombinatorial possibilities of the archive's contents renders representing "Patchen" no less problematic than determining the "true" identity of Charles Foster Kane.

Yet another of Crimp's analogies for the "museum's ruins," provides an illuminating parallel for deconstructing "Xanadu." Crimp analyzes the situation of the "two loony Parisian bachelors" in Flaubert's Bouvard and Pécuchet, which may be linked both to the situation of the reporter in Citizen Kane and to his academic truth-sleuthing counterpart, the literary biographer. The bachelors, (curiously both copy clerks like Melville's "Bartleby" and, in a manner of speaking, my father) have failed at their desk jobs, and thus begin a search for a more satisfying profession. As Crimp summarizes the tale, in order to "prepare themselves for each of their new professions," the bachelors "consult various manuals and treatises" only to discover "contradictions and misinformation" and the

ultimate realization that all of their actions are "incommensurate with the texts which purport to represent it" (48).

The implication for the transformation of knowledge in the realm of the electronic is suggested in Crimp's summary analysis of Eugenio Donato's essay on Flaubert's novel. Crimp points out that Donato "argues persuasively that the emblem for the series of heterogeneous activities of Bouvard and Pecuchet is not, as Foucault and others have claimed, the library-encyclopedia, but rather the museum" as "the museum contains everything the library contains and contains the library as well" (48). In the age of the electronic, the existence of a Patchen archive in the form of an interactive hypertext, acknowledges the "ruined" status of a traditionally 'authorized' biographical portrait and opens up the space for a cubist perspective for which no single tour of the ruins will provide a definitive interpretation.

### Conclusion

What, then, can finally be said about my relationship to Patchen as revealed, potentially, by my return to the crash site, to the scene of some "repressed" that threatens eternally to haunt me. At the personal level it would seem to be my identification with Patchen's incomplete mourning and the inability to adequately express the 'lack' and sense of loss related to the 'other' who alludes one from beyond the realm of language. At the popular level it would appear to be my readerly and writerly obsession with texts of all kinds which explore the boundaries of language, of presence and absence. I seem compelled to want to find some confirmation that the existence of such texts, and the epistemological phenomenon they explore and attempt to re-present, link me to a community of other writers and readers who wander restlessly, as I do, between the lines,

or, to paraphrase Korzybski, in a territory 'off the map. And at the disciplinary level, I must seek in some way to resolve the professional dilemma presented to me nearly two decades ago by the challenge to write a Patchen biography. The initiation of this project, at precisely the time when critical theory was turning its sites on the very foundations of disciplinary approaches to subject representation, combined with the emergence of new forms of electronic media and their potential to transfer the logic and grammatological practices inherent in this new space of writing, has further complicated and enriched this process of discovery.

Along the way, one might ask what happened to those treasured lodestones of biographical data to which are often attracted the magnetic details of a life that make for such good copy and have served to popularize the genre in recent years. Did Patchen, for example, receive his infamous back injury while a) playing high school football, b) separating two entangled car bumpers or, c) cleaning a gas storage tank? Was he the model romantic poet/husband, whose every new title was dedicated to his beloved "Miriam," or, as the feminist might have it, did he imprison her in the confining persona of the domesticated muse?

While questions such as these remain interesting and, in some cases, substantive issues in the Patchen narrative, it has been my experience that elements such as the status of Patchen's wounds, both physical, and as figuratively depicted in his art, incessantly lead me to explore not so much the subject-who-worked-with-language but rather the subject as both the affect-of-language and the agent capable of effecting alternative ways of extending language into postlogocentric realms of communication.

One final example, one poem, one freely floating signifier which has landed in "the attic" may serve to represent simultaneously our exit and our entrance into Patchwork—into Xanadu revisited. We'll call it our "Rosebud" moment, our lost sled, erased at an earlier moment of filmic memory under the clear white-out of freshly fallen snow, later to be discovered as a 'trace' by our house detective, in the hall-of-ruins, the room that 'lack' built and then obsessively filled with whatever the net of unquenchable desire could sweep up. I would preface the discussion of this example with yet another instance of hypertextual interconnectedness which links us back to Anais Nin's diary and her characterization of Citizen Kane as "a film that magnifies a thousand times the dream of emptiness" (117). Nin further notes that "the castle and the art objects become devoid of meaning except as possessions of material value" (117). I would counter by suggesting that as free floating signifiers, their emptiness is not unrelated to their detachment from any determinable signified.

Patchen's "The Lute in the Attic" (Collected Poems 378), is described by Nelson as "one of his compassionate poems of psychological terror" (59). The story of the poem, Nelson identifies as having to do with "some crime Willy [the poem's persona] committed when young" (59). Nelson notes "the primordial nature of his sin and that it was violent and bloody and probably sexual" (59). If one wishes to triangulate this poem with the seemingly thinly veiled autobiographical short story, "Come Bury Them In God," in which the schizoid split voice of the fiction's protagonist is interrupted by that of the author of the fiction, at which point the fear of incestuous desire is discussed-- then one might conclude the poet did, in fact, have such feelings for his sister, Kathleen, and that her sudden death in the traffic accident resulted, as speculated earlier in this chapter, in

incomplete mourning and an haunting identification with the deceased. Nelson's reading of the poem suggest the possibility that Isalina, Willy's object of affection , "is his sister," but adds, more importantly, that such mysteries in "The Lute in the Attic" are "intensified by the anonymity of the speaker" and the "sinister" aspects of "the fog blunted house" (59-60). Of the presence of the "lute" in the poem, Nelson acknowledges that from a traditional literary perspective the lute "is primarily a symbol of the lyric art with which humanity has responded to the challenges of failure, death, and the unfamiliar " and that "it could also be a physical object which has been put away and forgotten, and which, being turned up, triggers a stream of melancholy associations" (61).

Here we have the "lute" as Lacan's *objet petit a* the "chimerical object of fantasy" to cite Zizek's phrasing, and "the object causing our desire and at the same time—this is it's paradox—posed retroactively by this desire." Adds Zizek, ". . . in 'going through the fantasy' we experience how this fantasy-object (the 'secret') only materializes the void of our desire" (65). Kane's "Rosebud" disseminates throughout the 'hall-of-ruins, with its bellowing furnace, its holocaust of signifiers rising as ash above "Xanadu." In Citizen Patchen this "multitude of floating signifiers" may be, in terms of Zizek's sublime object of ideology, "structured into a unified field through the intervention of certain 'nodal points'" that "'quilts' them, stops their sliding and fixes their meaning" (Zizek 87). Well, sort of. If the quilt pattern is a "crazy" one, and the "patches" are electronically configured, (or to use the technical term "reassemble editing"), then we are looking at a multitude of nodal points, seen here also as punctums, stings of memory giving off sharp, pricking electronic shocks of recollection.

Thus, even as Žižek describes the possibility of "quilting floating signifiers through 'Communism'" in a manner that "confers a precise and fixed signification" to a range of otherwise dissociated concepts ("real democracy . . . ecologism . . . peace movement"), so too might the many floating signifiers associated with "Kenneth Patchen" be similarly quilted, later to be disassembled and the patches recirculated through an economy of desire until they reappear in yet another mystorical configuration. Such a process of interactive "reading" becomes revelatory in a manner, I would argue, far beyond that of most traditionally composed literary biographies. We are in position of knowing and not knowing, and, most significantly, of sharpening our awareness of why and how this is so.

In Chapter 6, the CATT's "tale/taillie," I will conclude this study with an abridged tour through Patchwork, conceptualized as "Xanadu" revisited, "Xanadu" as Citizen Kane detoured as Citizen Patchen, upon whose walls hang crazy quilts, the individual patches of which link rhizomatically the contents of this mystorical museum space.

I will close this chapter with a reference to one feature of the Patchwork software, its "Screen Saver." We'll call it the "Jack Lescoulie Memorial Screen Saver" in tribute to his twin roles as gaff-buster for Today host, Dave Garroway, and as the figure in Patchwork emblematic of the project's dedication to the Derridean notion of 'living on, of survival. Thus, during periods of inactivity on the program, (or conveniently saved to the hard drive for a more permanent reminder of its absence/presence), there will appear an image of "Xanadu's" basement out of the closing shots of Citizen Kane/Citizen Patchen throughout which walks the ghostly, apparitional figure of Jack Lescoulie—the ghost in the machine.

## CHAPTER 6 THE CATT(t)'S TALE/TAILE

### Introductory Screens

The first screen to appear on the Patchwork CD-Rom will be an image of a crazy quilt that will rearrange itself through a series of recombinations of patchwork squares. Within each of the individual patches will be various iconic designs or emblems which will later appear in the tour through "Xanadu," either as independent icons linked to material embedded in the archive or as patches on the various quilts that will appear on the walls of "Xanadu" and which will similarly link to other locations in the archive. At this point the viewer, or "addressee" as I would prefer to call the indeterminable receiver of this material, will not know in what sense the patches are emblematic and, thus, they will function here aesthetically as a means to introduce the homonymic play of "Patchen" as "patch," and the process of "patchworking" as the hobby theory employed in the mystory.

These initial patches will then dissolve and there will then appear on the screen the opening title, also represented in the style of a quilt "sampler," with the words, "Patchwork: a Mysteriobiography," woven into the squares of the quilt. This quilt pattern will in turn dissolve and there will next appear the opening image of "Xanadu" out of Citizen Kane, first seen in quilted form and then morphing into the photographic image of the movie still. The camera then zooms in via a series of lap dissolves, arriving finally at a close-up of the letter "K" that rests atop the gate barring access to the estate. After a few seconds the emblematic "K" will begin to alternate with the letters "P" for Patchen and

"R" for Robitaille. The intuitive addressee of this interactive text will note that by clicking on the emblem in sequence with one of the letters, he calls up a series of pages that explain how each of the names emblemized by the initials on the gate functions within the general concept of the signature effect, and more precisely, in the context of the mystery. At a later point in the exploration of the labyrinthine archive, the addressees will be asked to type in their initial, and upon exiting "Xanadu" at the conclusion of each tour, the addressees will note that their initials now appears in rotation with the original three. A click upon their own initial brings up a tour map that recaps the pattern of their progression through "Xanadu." The map is first presented schematically as an outline, and gradually dissolves into an image of a crazy quilt, the pattern of which is determined by the sequence of choices indicated in the outline here randomly reconfigured as emblems on their own personal Patchwork quilt—a record, if you will, of their own bliss-sense.

#### Scene/Space One: The Bedroom

Following the opening sequence of screens described above, the addressee is presented with a floor plan of "Xanadu" that invites the interactor to tour either the ruins of this mystical archive according to the sequence of scenes as they occur in the film, or to move at will to any of the virtual locations within. For purposes of this preview of Patchwork, I will describe these scene/spaces following the sequence of the film.

The first stop, then, would be Kane's bedroom (with some embellishments), site of the famous "Rosebud" sequence in which the dying Kane drops a glass ball while uttering the word "Rosebud." As this screen/scene comes up we observe that there is a section of police crime-scene tape stretched across the room in front of Kane's bed. The body, at this point is covered by a sheet, and one hand is seen extending out from the cover, gripping



the glass ball. Within the ball the three initials alternately appear, and when the mouse is clicked in sequence with the "K," for example, the sheet dissolves, Kane's body is revealed, makes it's last gesticulations and utters "Rosebud." The ball then drops to the floor, accompanied by the wildtrack sound of the screeching cockatoo, imported from its later appearance in the film. As the ball hits the floor it breaks into shards which then float across the screen and transform themselves into the various patches of a crazy quilt. The various patches of the Kane quilt now adorning the wall will, when clicked upon, call up smaller screens, each of which contains a fragment of information that, when juxtaposed against other fragments hidden behind the other patches (here also functioning in the sense of an "electronic patch"), constitutes a non-linear commentary suggesting the parallels between the reporter-as-detective and the biographer-as-deconstructionist. Other fragments will introduce a sort of meditation on the function of "Rosebud" as a floating signifier linked to the concepts of the punctum of memory and site of catastrophe.

If one clicks on the glass ball in sequence with the initial "P," the room is suddenly transformed into the imagined bedroom of Kenneth Patchen, where, as the biographical record reveals, the author spent most of his writing life, from his self-sequestered childhood through the many tormented adult years of severe back pain. When the scene has been so transformed, the glass ball drops from Patchen's hand and we hear him utter the name of his beloved sister, "Kathleen," whom he lost to a car accident when they were both adolescents. As the ball hits the floor, we again hear the cockatoo shriek, and the glass shards similarly float across the room while transforming themselves into the Patchen quilt that comes to adorn the bedroom wall.

Clicking on other objects in the room results in the movement of the Patchen figure to that location. These objects and their locations come to represent a gestural language revealed in the archival material that extends the range of his writing practice, as well as that which is signified by his signature, beyond the realm of the logocentric. For example, clicking on a chair that is positioned conspicuously facing a blank wall results in an image of Patchen sitting, *Bartleby*-like, (or might we suggest, *Zazen*-like), facing this blank surface. Accounts of Patchen's habit of entering a crowded room, only to position himself in such a fashion, date back to his childhood, according to interviews and personal correspondence shared with me. When this scene is brought up by the addressee, it is accompanied by a smaller screen which relates the associated anecdotes, while also providing a hyperlink to a gurney resting against the opposite wall. By clicking on the gurney, we get a brief commentary on the various conflicting theories of Patchen's back problem, the international response to his medical needs, the famous undoing of his landmark spinal fusion and various speculations relating to the exposing of one's backside to the world.

The Patchen quilt itself repeats the paradigm of the fragmented commentary experienced while traversing the linked patches of the Kane quilt in the previous screen. In this instance, the nonlinear pastiched material accessed behind each quilt patch presents an inquiry into the function of key floating signifiers in the Patchen archive that parallel those associated, say, with "Rosebud" in the case of Kane. One quilt patch, represented by the image of a lute, would introduce various perspectives on Patchen's poem, "The Lute In The Attic," while another would explore the associations of the signifier, "Miriam," the

poet's wife and muse, with "Kathleen" and the many other variants on the female "other" that proliferate throughout the Patchen archive.

Finally, should you click on the ball in the bedroom scene while the "R" is exposed within, the room becomes a facsimile of the author's college apartment, within which he first encountered the Patchen signature, written in the ubiquitous childlike scrawl across the cover of The Journal of Albion Moonlight, a gift of the author's lover. As with the earlier screen, the cover lifts from the hidden corpus, this time to expose the youthful Robitaille, and as the ball drops, the word "Patchen" is heard escaping from Robitaille's mouth and the shards of the broken ball transform themselves into the crazy quilt patches of the Robitaille quilt.

This variation of the bedroom, like the others, includes objects which signify important moments in the mystory. On the desk is a photo of Robitaille with Miriam Patchen taken in 1970 at the opening of the Patchen Archive at the University of California at Santa Cruz. A click upon this picture, calls up an embedded text in the form of a meditation on the confused mix of emotions that relate the various parties involved in this biographical enterprise: poet, widow, biographer. The meditation includes self-interrogation into the phenomenon of transference and projection, of what is confided to me by a diverse group of conspicuously biased informants, of questions I choose to ask, and those I do not—and why?

Off to one side is a miniature x-ray of Robitaille's back, with its clear evidence of deteriorating disks, inviting the addressee to muse over the coincidence that both the biographer and his subject share a similarly fractured corpus and periods of debilitating pain. On the bookshelf is a postcard from Henry Miller to the biographer. One side bears

the image of a Miller lithograph, a circus figure entitled "Clown A." The verso bears the inscription: "Am unable to answer all your questions about Patchen, Nin, etc. I am now (at 88) cultivating my forgettery, not my memory. Besides I have great trouble seeing. Henry Miller." A click on this card call up a reverie on the function of memory and "forgettery" as it might relate to the construction of this mystery.

Of the Robitaille quilt hanging on the wall, it will be noted that like the previous screens, the random accessing of the various patches engages the addressee in a circuitous commentary on how "Patchen" may come to serve, in Žižek's terminology, as a 'point de capiton, as the quilting point for the mystoribiographer, stitching together the fragments which at any given moment constitute the perpetually fluctuating elements of his mystery. Like some "strange attractor," "Patchen" brings together within the bounded field of this chaotically inspired text, various "crazy" quilt patterns whose recombinatorial possibilities shine an oblique light on a subject whose position shifts, with predictable relativity, somewhere slightly out of view.

The Robitaille quilt to appear in the "screening room" sequence to be described below will bring together the various disciplinary perspectives which form the prism of this Patchen study. In the present instance, in the "safe" confines of one's bedroom, the focus of the quilt patches is on the personal—on those objects and occasions to which Barthes would assign the designation "third meaning." The questions lurking behind these patches include, for example: how does one take into account what "chance," in a Cagney sense, delivers to us? What role do we assign to the undecidable elements that guide our ostensibly rational disciplinary endeavors? What would it mean to follow my bliss-sense as a biographer and allow the materials I have gathered in my research to inform me as to the

patterns of my academic impulse, rather than pretending that the "truth" I have coughed up from my subject's throat has nothing to do with the blood on my hands?

### Scene/Space Two: The Projection Room

The next scene/space to be explored in "Xanadu" is Kane's personal film projection room. In the film, following the bedroom scene, Welles and Mankiewicz present a film-within-a-film in the form of News on the March, a takeoff on the popular March of Time of the period. Within the film Citizen Kane, the newsreel serves the double function of blurring the distinction of the fiction-within-the-fiction, even as it purports to elevate the larger fiction of Citizen Kane to the level of newsreal, thus suggesting the link between Kane and William Randolph Hearst.

In my detournment of Citizen Kane as Citizen Patchen, I am relocating the screening of the newsreel from the newspaper office to "Xanadu's" projection room. When the image for this room first comes up there appears projected on the movie screen the glass ball with the alternating initials. If one clicks on the "K" there is then seen assembled in the audience the major characters from the film, each of whom, as we know, is interviewed by the "reporter" in the film concerning the meaning and possible origin of the word "Rosebud." As you click on each of the characters, a "quick time" clip from his respective sequences in the film is shown on the screen. Following each clip, the question, "Is there any response from the audience?," is heard spoken and appears simultaneously on the screen. With each click of the assembled characters, including, as well, both Welles and Mankiewicz, respective hand to be raised and each is then heard to respond with a deconstruction of his own position within the film's narrative vis-à-vis the floating

signifier, "Rosebud," as well as his reflections on the general problematic of representing a life.

A click on the initial "P" results in an audience filled with some of the major figures involved in the Patchen biography. This includes not only the biographer, Robitaille, but the poet's widow, Miriam, and a diverse range of writers, artists, musicians, publishers, critics, scholars and personal acquaintances, all of whom share perspectives sufficiently askew as to contribute to the cubist quality of the resulting portrait. From a menu of selected moments in the life there appears a brief sequence on the screen, again followed by the query, "Are there any questions or comments from the audience?" By clicking on any of the upraised hands, we solicit a series of reactions to the screened sequences, the contents of which are derived from published sources or interviews, and which appear without editorial comment from the biographer.

Finally, a click on the initial "R" populates the audience with figures associated in some way with the biographer's work on this project. The scenes to be projected in this context are those involving the mystoriobiographer's difficulty in sorting out the material for Patchwork, and his coming to terms with the increasingly conflicted relationship he shares with his subject, Kenneth Patchen, and perhaps more significantly, with the pursuit of this subject via an academic, disciplinary-based analysis of that which he assumes to be represented by this signature. The result of randomly calling up the project's *dramatis personae* will be to experience in some admittedly diffuse way, the schizoid nature of interacting with, and responding to, the many pulls and tugs of theory and explanatory influences that vie for the attention and acceptance of the biographer. The

resulting vertigo should, in some small way, provide an experiential mode of connection between the addressee and the nomadic mystorian.

### Scene/Space Three: The Newsroom

Moving the cursor about the screen of the Kane news room reveals a number of hotlinks to various mystorical elements of Patchwork. A click on the figure of a man laying out type for a page template discloses the fact that he is the mystoriobiographer's father, consigned to repeat the motions of inserting the "slugs" of lead type for a recounting of his own life story. While in the opposite corner, a figure dressed in what might be best described as the garb of an impoverished ascetic stares at a blank wall and, when clicked upon, utters the repeated refrain: "I prefer not to." At another easel, a banner headline reads: "News From Catastrophe Site." The passing of the cursor over this headline reveals a series of embedded stories reporting, in no particular order, the fatal car accidents of Robitaille's grandfather, Patchen's sister, Kathleen, and Kane's first wife and child. Additional catastrophe sites include the bombing of Hiroshima, the Challenger explosion, the nuclear bombing of Florida in Alas, Babylon, and the death by steam roller of Today host, Dave Garroway. Brief accounts of these events accompany each story, along with photos, some bearing the disclaimer, "artist's rendering" or "photo manipulation."

In Citizen Kane the newsroom is the focal point of Kane's obsessive desire to disseminate the "Kane" signature via the mass distribution of his publishing dynasty. In so doing, his obsession expands to include the attempt to influence world events, and, eventually, secure political office. The deconstructive critique written into this scene of the now detourned Citizen Patchen, has to do with the problematics of historical

representation and will take the form of transforming the newsroom activity into that of a quilting bee. When the initial screen comes up there appears to be the usual trappings of a newsroom, but in the center, where traditionally there would be located a U-shaped desk called "the slot," around which sat copy editors who proofed stories and wrote accompanying headlines, there here appears a group of persons each stitching away on his respective square of a large patchwork quilt. In the center of the quilt is the orb-shaped insignia with the alternating initials. When the click of the mouse is on the "K," there appears a pattern of iconic designs in the various patches of the quilt. A click on each of these patches results in the appearance of a different lead story, photo and headline on a newspaper laid out to the left of the quilters on a copy editor's easel. Each of these stories focuses on a different aspect of Kane's multifaceted persona as represented by some key sequence of the film shown here as the photo accompanying the story.

With the selection of each of the figures sitting around "the slot," a different segment of copy is seen to appear surrounding the central, or lead, story. Each of these surrounding "sidebars" constitutes another in the series of deconstructive "readings" of the film. The visual effect here is intended to replicate the midrash tradition, which viewed aesthetically, anticipates the compositional strategies of hypertext. From a critical perspective, the addition of this device in the process of *inventio* allows us to link Patchwork via the tradition of Talmudic exegesis to the open ended, reader response mode encouraged by *mystoriobiography*.

For example, a click on the "reporter's" square would "patch" you in to the headline, "'Rosebud' Eludes Reporters," accompanied by a shot of Kane's memorabilia-filled cellar, which would in turn be surrounded by commentary linking Welles's infamous



"floating signifier" to segments of the exchange of views between --and--regarding "The Purloined Letter." A click on, say, Kane's wife, for example would present a feminist perspective which she is unable to adequately voice in the film, and which, perhaps, links the tyranny of Kane's logocentric enterprise with the failed nature of his domestic relations. With this particular link, as with others throughout the hypertext mystoriobiography, a hyperlink would introduce an embedded screen in which the addressee is invited to consider the possible parallel between the captive state of Kane's wife and Miriam Patchen, the poet's cloistered muse for whom adoration and protection from the world, according to various sources, have had had its price. One final example here might be the inclusion of Mankiewicz, whose "patch" calls up the title page of the screenplay, and whose surrounding commentary reminds us of the controversy surrounding the "origin" of "Citizen Kane," of writing credit appropriated and denied, and of the presence within the work of certain mystorical elements that, like a Chinese box, further complicate the inside/outside of textual boundary-making.

When the mouse is clicked over the center square of the quilt the alternating letters change as do the identity of the quilters. When "P" is engaged there appears a congregation of Patchen's reviewers, critics, scholars and biographers. The patches within the quilt now represent Patchen book covers, painted poems, poetry-jazz album jackets and other of the author's multi-media works. When one of these items is chosen some of the quilters' hands are seen to rise and a window opens providing a brief bio each. Choosing one of the quilters transforms the quilt into another midrash-like pattern with a commentary from the "reader" now surrounding the highlighted text. As each of the figures is chosen his respective commentary is added to the midrash. The net effect of

scanning these pastiched elements is to encounter the disparate, often contradictory, readings of the art and life.

When the "R" is chosen, the group of quilters again changes and there is now assembled represent various theorists whose critical strategies have been at the foreground of deconstructive analysis and issues central to this study, such as the status of the "author," "truth," and the problematics of representation. Thus, when one of the panels of the Robitaille quilt is chosen, a new page of midrash is introduced by hyper-linking, or "patching" together, responses from the quilters to selected fragments of material from the Patchen archive.

One set of choices might serve here as an example of this midrash would be created. Let us say that one of the panels reveals a facsimile of the cover of Patchen's The Journal of Albion Moonlight, a cover on which appears a page of crazed prose from the journal in Patchen/Albion's signature scrawl. A click on this image brings up another of the journal's pages, this one exhibiting one of the more extreme examples of the text's exploded barrages of form and death-haunted, violence-smeared prose. A tour of the perspectives of the assembled hobby theorists whose hands are raised in conjunction with the shifting of the mouse reveals their actual or imagined musings on the excerpts as they appear, one by one, to surround the central fragment.

For purposes of demonstration I have, with the aid of the I-Ching, arrived at the choice of pages 118-19. Here are some thoughts concerning the possible responses from the patchworkers. Jacques Derrida is interested in Patchen's exploration of a double space of writing and in the performative aspects of a textual practice that serves both as creative fiction, even as it functions as a critical commentary on the nature of language itself, with

its slippages, gaps and undecidable cross-currents. Roland Barthes is fascinated by the display of bliss-sense, and in a writing that is not premeditated and which provides multiple levels of semiotic play. Patchen's publisher, James Laughlin, is represented by a long letter he wrote to Patchen suggesting an alternative structure for the novel that might serve to eliminate the sort of disorder represented in the page in question. Laughlin is responding to feedback he has received from critic Edmund Wilson, to whom he sent the manuscript, seeking, and indeed receiving, a corroboration of his negative response to the book. From Virginia Admiral, mother of actor Robert De Niro and Patchen's typist, there is an interview with this author describing the circumstances surrounding the writing of the Journal, the pages flowing like automatic writing, as the poet propped himself on his side in bed, suffering from another period of back pain. Henry Miller writes in his essay, "Man of Anger, Man of Light," concerning the justification for the artist's anger and the legitimacy of the deranged lucidity which characterize these pages. Foucault contributes a commentary on the function of such Nietzschean literature in world increasingly suppressed by failed social institutions, while Deleauze and Guattari find evidence here of the sort of health producing "schiz flow" that elevates Patchen's proletarian art to a form of critical cultural response to the voracious appetite of identity consuming capitalism. Bakhtin's excerpt celebrates the Journal's employment of the carnivalesque, and Norman Holland provides the theoretical underpinning for the addition of reader response contributions in the form of addressee graffiti on the midrash wall.

Thus, each click of the mouse on the center quilt patch is capable of calling up examples of Patchen's work in various media. Accordingly, a hobby theorist's response to an art critic's review of Patchen's painted poems might be juxtaposed with a

psychoanalytic reading of the primitive, ameba-like creatures that inhabit these works. A page of John Lennon's similar drawings and nonsense verse in his A Spaniard In The Works would be seen juxtaposed against a letter in the Laughlin file expressing interest by Apple Records to produce a project based on Patchen's work.

#### Scene/Space: Four: The Thatcher Memorial Library

In Citizen Kane, the entrance to the Thatcher Memorial Library is guarded by "Bertha," whose black-booted demeanor and rigid conditions for accessing the Kane materials are in turn ominous and comically indicative of the weight placed upon supposed rare and private matters. The Mankiewicz script tells us the room has "all the warmth and charm of Napoleon's tomb" (Kael 133). Thus, our detournment of this scene requires only a modest shift in direction to arrive at the repository for the Patchen and Robitaille corpuses.

I have added a plaque outside the entrance of the library in the initial screen which bears the following inscription from a letter Franz Kafka to Oskar Pollack:

. . . the books we need are the kind that act upon us like a misfortune, that make us suffer like the death of someone we love more than ourselves, that make us feel as though we were on the verge of suicide, or lost in a forest remote from all habitation—a book should serve as the ax for the frozen sea within us.

A shift of the cursor to the position of the inscription results in the opening of the doors to the library. Inside, the main room is seen to be divided into three sections bearing the now familiar initials "K," "P," and "R." By selecting one of the initials, the addressee may then access a vast collection of archival materials related to Kane, Patchen and Robitaille.

In the Kane section are a variety of books, scholarly articles, press reviews, essays and other materials related to Citizen Kane. A click on each item on the shelf provides access to selected excerpts, and in some cases, entire copies of this material.

Section "P" holds a vast array of Patchen titles, as well as primary and secondary source materials related to the artist's life and work. The "R" or Robitaille collection includes materials from the this study's "List of References," as well as a diverse range of material that form the constellation of elements that inform the shaping of Patchwork. It is here, in this library, that the addressee may meander through the intertextual fabric of signifying patchworking materials in their as yet unquilted state. The interactor is invited to add hyperlinks between any combination of items for the purpose of constructing their own crazy quilt pattern.

#### Scene/Space Five: The Jazz Tent

Yet another potential point of intersection between Citizen Kane and Citizen Patchen involves Kane's bizarre picnic in the Florida Everglades. In the original screenplay, "The Florida Camp," Hearst's San Simeon estate writ tropical, consists of "a number of classy tents" (Kael 265). In the final shooting script there is added a lap dissolve to a "colored man singing" a tune that begins, "It can't be love. For there is no true love" (409). The lyrics of the song would seem to provide an ironic commentary on the theme of failed love in the movie. Our embellishment of this scene is to transform the side panels of the tent into a large crazy quilt over which surface movement of the cursor calls forth the chora or fragmentary Lacanian commentaries on the "lack" which haunts what passes for "love" in the lives of these characters.

A signboard outside the tent in the opening screen reveals the alternating three initials and when the "P" is engaged the tent is transformed into a 1950's jazz club and Patchen's photo with a jazz quartet now adorns the marquee. Select this image and you enter the hall where the tent panels, once again composed of quilt patches, provide access to selections from Patchen's recordings of poetry jazz. During any of these performances, the lyrics of each poem appear on a separate screen and by simultaneously clicking on a member of the audience, you can call up various "readings" and reviews of Patchen's poetry-jazz. These commentaries address such issues as how the shift into a musical register allowed Patchen and other jazz-poets, to expand the range of artistic expression via multi-media. Other perspectives include the relationship of jazz to dissonance, and what New Yorker music critic, Alex Ross, describes as the response of the "panicking ear" that is both drawn to and repelled by "the kind of harmonic density that shatters into noise" and the related "pleasure" in "the control of chaos, in the movement back and forth across the border of what is comprehensible" (Ross 76). While Patchen may have been more aligned with the "cool" versus the "hot" jazz-poets, the extension of his work into the medium seems consistent with his earlier collaboration with other border crossing avant-garde artists such as John Cage. Such adventures into exploded forms allowed Patchen the freedom to experiment in fiction and collage poetry.

Select the "R" on the marquee and the view inside the tent is again transformed, this time revealing tent walls bearing patchworked designs containing embedded fragments of mystorical material, each with an audio "sample" from Robitaille's jazz collection. One of the patches is blank and, in the manner of those popular scrambled picture puzzles, the movement of the fragments from one location to another in the quilt, accesses an array of

Patchen's collage poems while simultaneously modifying the audio track. A click on the "play" button below the musical quilt provides the listener with a reading of the poem to the accompanying discordant bites of sampled jazz.

#### Other Scenes/Other Spaces

The above mentioned scenes are a selected representation of the many, as yet, unmentioned spaces into which we might enter during our tour of "Xanadu." Other such spaces might include the "Chapel" or "Mausoleum." wherein are located the famous collection of "mourning quilts" whose patches link us to that grand tradition of quilts intended to evoke the punctum of personal loss. These rare quilts are inspired variously by the sting of the collected, here conflated, memories of Kane/Patchen/Robitaille that stitch together the knitted elements of the mystory, particularly as they relate to language, loss and mourning.

And then there is Susan's Interactive Puzzle Parlor in which the obsessive, escapist puzzle-making by Kane's wife is here transformed into a video game room in which each screen presents a patchwork design perforated into puzzle segments that enable the addressee to disassemble and reconfigure a variety of Patchen materials including his collage/concrete poetry, and selected portrait photographs taken over the long span of the artist's career.

Of course, ruins such as those we have traversed here, customarily bear the mark of incompleteness, some spaces being under construction, while others are under erasure, or abandoned. Such is the state of our virtual site. The addressee is invited to imagine other spaces, other rooms. To "move in," so to speak, and make their own presence

known here by reconfiguring the existing elements or adding new patches to the quilt, and new rooms to hang them in.

### Final Scene/Space: The Cellar as Site of "das Ding"

In the closing segment of Citizen Kane, we enter "Xanadu's" cellar where we view the dust covered artifacts that come to represent the ruins of the Kane legacy. Earlier I discussed the semiotic joke played out here, the admission by the reporter that a life cannot be summed up by a word and the false sense of signifying security suggested by the camera's discovery of Kane's lost childhood sled and its inscription, "Rosebud."

In my detournment, Citizen Patchen, this ruined space is transformed into the ruins of Patchwork--quite virtually, a scrap heap of archival material, each neglected item of which may be opened up to reveal a fragment of the mystoriobiography's nonlinear concluding, though deliberately inconclusive, closing commentary. In this space, the moving cursor takes the form of the ghostly Bartleby. When this apparitional figure is placed in contact with a given patch of scrap material, there appears a bubble, or a series of bubbles, of commentary associated with the iconic or emblematic image appearing on the patch. Some of these patches represent Patchen's writings, fragments of which invite deconstruction and which may be surrounded by seemingly unrelated fragments from diverse sources such as critical theory, biographical data, items from the news or popular culture, etc. In other instances the scraps may represent perspectives from critical theorists, literary reviews and the like, similarly surrounded by excerpts from Patchen's art. On occasion, opening up a scrap at one end of the cellar will cause a scrap at another sector to rise up and balloon outward exposing its various fragments of dissociated commentary.



While the mere passing over of each patch, or scrap of material, by the ghostly figure gives rise to these balloons of fragmented commentary, a click of the mouse on any given scrap causes the spectral figure to pick up the scrap and carry it over to the furnace where it is pitched into the flames along with "Rosebud" and the rest of Kane's hoarded objets petit a's. Should the tormented addressee endure this process down to the last scrap, or when they have decided, no doubt mercifully, to engage the cellar's "exit" button, the Bartleby figure is seen to pitch himself into the inferno, and out of the ash cloud disseminating from the estate's smokestack appears the following words from Melville's tale:

Dead letters? does it not sound like dead men? Conceive a man by nature and misfortune prone to a pallid hopelessness, can any business seem more fitted to heighten it than that of continually handling these dead letters, and assorting them for the flames?

What is indeed being worked out in this space, and which is similarly represented in various of the patches of the scrap heap cum dissociated commentary, is the fate of biography writ deconstructively, mystorically. It has been almost thirty years to the day from my first encounter with Patchen's Albion Moonlight on my bed stand, to my entrance into, and exit from, this cellar. What began naively as an attempt to write a life developed over time into a desire to "right" a life—as in: make correct, salvage, protect, recuperate. Soon the question arose: whose life was I writing/righting? More complicated questions followed, such as the identity of that which, in fact, prompted the writing, and thus, needed to be righted.

Ultimately it was in search of these "truths" that the project was undertaken, rendering incidental the more traditional truths associated with literary biography—truths

that attempt to thematize or in some other reductive manner explain away the central core of a writer's being as somehow deduced from dissecting the literary corpus and excavating the ruins of the biographical archive. Indeed, the very notion of sifting through such material for pertinent and explanatory strategies was itself deconstructed by calling into question the very status of "examples," the logic of which, suggests Ulmer and others, is "a special case of concept formation" (Ulmer, Applied Grammatology 100). In his discussion of the exchange between Lacan and Derrida concerning Poe's "The Purloined Letter," Ulmer considers how Lacan's inclination to give predominance to the signifier follows from the failure to take into account "the framing, the mise en scène, of the narrative form itself" (101). Derrida's deconstruction of Lacan's practice points to a "textual drifting off course of the tale's narrative" resulting from the "graft of intertextuality which opens the tale to other stories and settings . . ." (102). Ulmer concludes his discussion with a quote from Derrida replete with Melvillian overtones: "I am always the letter that never arrives" (102). And striking a chord sounded throughout this project, Ulmer notes: "The problematic of the narrator in literature...applies equally to the author-narrator in academic discourse, making the frame and the signature the same question" (102).

I suppose it is the holy/wholly grail of "truth" that every reporter/literary biographer hopes will arrive during the chasing of one's tale/taille. That piece of the puzzle which eternally eludes us, and whose presence might serve to reassure, even as its absence haunts. And so, as I slowly pan the surfaces of my study, with its shelves of books, files of Patchen related correspondence, critical articles and the like, these "things" appear as so many scraps of patchworking material now strewn about my virtual cellar. And it is here,

in the prescient moment, that I return to Žižek and his contemplation of the various stages of Lacan's teaching regarding the connection between the death drive and the symbolic order.

"das Ding": This Place "Between Two Deaths"

When I consider the prolific outpouring of work in various media produced by Patchen following the writing of his youthful letter to Isabel Stein in which he hoped to escape the deathly constraints of language by attempting to deconstruct it, I realize that I have been a witness to my own terrifying fall into the abyss which Žižek identifies as "a place of sublime beauty as well as terrifying monsters . . . the site of das Ding, of the real-traumatic kernel in the midst of symbolic order" (135).

A review of Žižek's summary analysis of the stages of Lacanian teaching parallels in many ways the evolution of Patchen's life and art. In what Žižek refers to as the first period, the focus is on "the Hegelian phenomenological idea that the word is death, a murder of a thing" (131). To turn, for example, "from the word "table" to the table itself in its physical reality," marks "a certain lack" and "recourse to the word . . . implies an absence of the thing" (131). Patchen's letter to Isabel Stein, with its alternative alphabet and its prophetic references to the schism which his life of (dead) letters would manifest, is a route similarly traced in Citizen Kane when neither the utterance of the word "Rosebud" nor its inscription on the sled is able to fill the lack experienced by a consciousness caught in a symbolic network.

In Lacan's second period, according to Žižek, "the accent is shifted from the word, speech, to language as a synchronic structure, a senseless autonomous mechanism which produces meaning as its effect" (131). At this stage, the "death drive is now identified with

the symbolic work itself." Symptomatic of this stage is a "compulsive repetition" which results when "the human being is caught in the signifier's network" and the resulting effect is, thus, "mortifying" (132). For Patchen, this condition may be said to have manifested itself in the compulsive repetition which structures so many of his works with their innumerable iterations of darkness and light, hope and despair, romantic love and horrific violence, incessantly encircling like carrion over the mortifying absence of the aw(e)ful, absent Other. It is a pattern easily repeated by his biographer caught in the signifying network authorized by his subject's profligate signature. In Citizen Kane, it is the compulsive repetition of Kane's hoarding of "things" which, having been drawn into the wide net of his lack-driven appetite, ultimately have the mortifying effect represented in the funeral gloom of "Xanadu."

But it is Lacan's third period, as Zizek describes it, that most haunts, and, in a Zen-like way, returns me to a calm and redemptive stillness. It is here we encounter the Freudian "das Ding" which Zizek describes as "the Thing as an incarnation of the impossible jouissance" (132). In this stage's crucial "shift of emphasis from the symbolic to the Real," Zizek identifies and describes with illuminating precision the essential "difference between real (biological) death and its symbolization" (135). In order to illustrate this difference, Zizek turns to popular culture and the cartoon for his model. He reminds us of the many variations of the theme of the cartoon cat who walks off the precipice onto thin air and who falls only after becoming aware of his Real condition. Zizek compares this scene to the status of the father in Freud's Interpretation of Dreams "who does not know that he is dead" (134). It is the impossible moment in Poe's "Vladimir," mentioned earlier, in which this recognition is marked by the unutterable

utterance, "I am dead." The point Žižek raises here that is crucial to Patchwork is precisely this mindfulness of the possibility of "supplementary lives" seen as "intimately related to the site of das Ding." Such is a "place . . . opened by symbolization/historicization: [in which] the process of historicization implies an empty place, a non-historical kernel around which the symbolic network is articulated" (135).

It is this "non-historical place, a place which cannot be symbolized," where our mystoriobiography, Patchwork, may be said to manifest its virtual non-existence. To enter here is to encounter the "brute" fate hauntingly described by Žižek, in which, once the "pre-symbolic reality is symbolized/historicized, it 'secretes', it isolates the empty, 'indigestible' place of the Thing" (135).

At this juncture, Žižek's analysis returns us to the notion of catastrophe and nuclear criticism, when he asserts that it is precisely "this reference to the empty place of the Thing which enables us to conceive the possibility of a total, global annihilation of the signifier's network" and that "absolute death, the 'destruction of the universe', is always the destruction of the symbolic universe" (135). To what extent Patchen had consciously worked out the relevance of this tangled web of thought seems impossible to ascertain. But that which may be said on the basis of the bliss-sense authorized by the effect of his signature suggests he was not unaware of the dangers and the *jouissance* to be encountered when crossing such borders and sacrificing his physical and literary corpus in exchange for a sublime one.

Biographers often write of the torturous experience they have subjected themselves to in pursuing their subject, whatever they ultimately come to determine that "subject" to be. Žižek refers to "the Sadeian notion of a radical, absolute crime that liberates nature's creative force" and, having done so, thus liberates nature from its own

laws and opens the way for the creation of new forms of life ex nihilo" (134). To locate a contemporary example of this phenomenon, Žizek turns to the popularity of the electronic and video games "in which we deal, literally, with the differences between two deaths" and in which the displayed figures possess multiple or "supplementary lives" (135). This may be yet another reason why my project is at home in this virtualized space. Thus, my cybercubist portrait of Patchen, like the fragmented image of Kane caught between the mirrored reality of his schizoid selves, defies easy assimilation into any system of signification.

In the final analysis, you may ask whether the problematics of biographical representation can be addressed by the chasing of the CATTt's tale/taillie. To which I would respond by noting a final example of sublime synchronicity. For, as it strangely turns out, Žizek's other example from "mass culture" of the difference between the two deaths is a scene from a Tom and Jerry cartoon in which Tom, the Cat, having been subjected to "frightful misadventures," not to mention "stabbed" and "dynamite goes off in his pocket," is finally "run over by a steamroller and his body flattened into a ribbon." Of course, in the next scene "he appears in his normal body and the game begins again" (134-5). There is obviously no way of escaping the punctum of one's past, and the image of the flattened Jack Lescoulie, not even in hobby theory land. He will return again and again, the screen "Saver," walking his ghostly rounds amidst the scraps of a life—a life which once deconstructed, awaits its eternal reconfiguration in the hands of the electronic patchworker.

There is no way to end this book.

No way to begin

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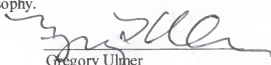
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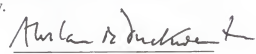
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Stephen Robitaille was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts, grew up largely in Florida and received his undergraduate degree in English education from the University of Florida in 1971. He returned to New England where he received his master's degree in English from the University of Hartford in 1974. Following his return to Florida in 1976 he joined the English/Media Studies faculty of Santa Fe Community College. Mr. Robitaille is an independent filmmaker and co-founder of the Florida Media Arts Center. He lives with his wife, Julie, and two children in a 100-year-old home they restored after moving it to Flamingo Hammock, an intentional community on the edge of Paynes Prairie near Gainesville, Florida.


I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quantity, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

  
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December 1998

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Dean, Graduate School

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